MAN PROPOSES

BY

ELIOT H. ROBINSON

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MAN PROPOSES

OR, THE ROMANCE OF JOHN ALDEN SHAW

Novels by
ELIOT R. ROBINSON

Man Proposes,
or
The Romance of John Alden Shaw

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" I WENT TO MY PLACE WITH THE COLD DETERMINATION TO WIN THAT MATCH ". (*See page 237*)

MAN PROPOSES

OR

THE ROMANCE OF JOHN ALDEN SHAW

BY

ELIOT H. ROBINSON

ILLUSTRATED BY
WILLIAM VAN DRESSER

"Man proposes, but God disposes"
—Thomas a Kempis

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TO

MY MOTHER

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MAN PROPOSES

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH I AM, BUT DO NOT APPEAR TO BE, SURPRISED

In the life of every man there occurs, I suppose, at least one incident,— perhaps a closely connected series of incidents,— which stamps its image so ineffaceably upon his mind that nothing can destroy or even dim it, save the all-obliterating hand of Death.

For my own part, I am certain that no matter what may be in store for me during that part of my allotted span of years which is to come, it cannot surplant or dull the recollection of that never-to-be-forgotten fortnight now nearly five years past, according to the calendar, but still so vivid in my memory that by merely closing my eyes I can to-day live again its joys in all their sweetness, and its pain in all its poignancy. Other memories, even of events which have happened since that time, are be-

coming mistily vague, but the most minute and trivial matters even of the day on which my "Great Adventure" had its inception, are still as clean cut in my mind as the tiny facets upon a diamond.

I can remember thinking somewhat rebelliously, as I began my work that August morning, that I was beyond cavil the very busiest man in Boston. And indeed my thought was probably founded upon fact, for it is fair to say that the youngest member of one of the oldest, largest and busiest firms of lawyers in a big city has at the best no sinecure,— and such was my position in the office of Thomas, Richards and Henry.

Not only is such a one continually at the beck and call of the members of the firm, all of whom — quite naturally — expect their particular cases to receive first attention, but each and every one of the remainder of the office force is forever celebrating his relief from a similar bondage by cheerfully placing upon the already over-laden shoulders of the unfortunate man who answers to the most lowly name upon the office door, any matter which may conceivably be regarded as beneath his august consideration.

I can say truthfully that I am neither a shirk nor one by nature particularly addicted to whining, but there were times, nevertheless, such as the day of which I speak, when even my willing spirit re-

belled in bitterness, and I felt, with considerable justice, that the famous Emancipation Proclamation had by no means completely terminated the institution of slavery in this land of the free and home of the brave.

On that particular day, indeed, my lot seemed to me especially bitter. The combination produced by the hottest day of the whole summer, the realization that one's vacation is a thing of the past — having ended the evening previous — the sight of a desk completely covered with folders of old and new cases to be prepared immediately for trial, letters to be read and answered, memoranda of telephone calls to be made, and notes — the general purport of which is, "Mr. Shaw. Please see me at once upon your return in regard to this, or that matter,"— is hardly likely to be conducive to pleasant thoughts.

"The daily round, the common task," *may* furnish all we need to ask, as the hymnist wrote, but I looked forward with no very keen anticipation to fifty weeks of this sort of thing before another season's vacation should bring respite.

So, perhaps, I can scarcely be blamed for having uttered an earnest and soul satisfying "Damnation!" when the telephone bell at my elbow jangled noisily for the fifth time in ten minutes. I jerked the receiver off angrily, saying "Well?" in none

too pleasant tones, and over the wire came the tired voice of our switchboard operator, "Mr. Shaw? Mr. Thomas wishes you to step into his office immediately."

When the head of the firm "requests," the youngest member thereof stands not upon the order of his going, but goes at once. Needless to say, I went, saying savagely to myself, "I hope to heaven he fires me," although, in fact, I hoped nothing of the sort.

A few seconds later I stood within the comparatively cool, dimly lighted and beautifully appointed office of the chief, and was listening to the bland greeting of that famous lawyer, to which was joined the kindly expressed hope that I had enjoyed and been benefited by my vacation. From my reply surely no one would have suspected my inward feelings of a moment previous.

Not until his well-modulated voice continued, "You are acquainted with Mr. Willard, are you not?" did I realize that there was a third person present.

I was. And who, in Boston, was not acquainted with him, at least by reputation? Was he not at this time the acknowledged leader of Hub society, wealthy, handsome, a member of the Back Bay's aristocratic lineage, an exceptionally capable business man, and, in the world of sport known as a

Julius S ROSEMAN

yachtsman, hunter, tennis star and polo player par excellence?

Moreover, he had recently been more than usually in the public eye because of his romantic marriage, only a fortnight previous, to Miss Margaret Lee, one of Virginia's most beautiful young débutantes, herself the possessor of very considerable fortune as well as exceptional loveliness, 'twas said. With this fact fresh in mind, and recalling the newspaper items which stated that the happy couple had sailed immediately after the marriage ceremony on Mr. Willard's steam yacht, *The Enchantress,* for a lengthy honeymoon in the Mediterranean, I was considerably astonished at his presence in our office.

As a matter of fact, I knew Mr. Willard personally somewhat, having met him socially a number of times and played tennis against him at Longwood, and I had also, as it chanced, the previous year tried a small unimportant case for him, so I answered in the affirmative and we exchanged the usual perfunctory greetings.

As we shook hands the thought struck me that his clasp was nervous and feverish, and a quick glance at his face disclosed unmistakable indications of worry and a strong hidden emotion.

"Please be seated, Mr. Shaw," said the chief.

"Have a cigar, Shaw?" broke in Mr. Willard

nervously, at the same time selecting one for himself from a monogrammed silver case.

I glanced enquiringly toward Mr. Thomas, for by an unwritten law, smoking in the office — by any member of the force at least — was tabooed since the head did not indulge in the solacing weed himself, and in this sanctum sanctorum not to be thought of.

He caught my questioning glance as I was on the point of refusing, and said, with the suggestion of a smile, "By all means, if you care to. I should imagine that friend Willard's brand might be somewhat different from that which you are accustomed to,— at least if your income is limited to what you receive from us. Their mellifluous fragrance makes even me wish at times that I could afford to indulge in the frivolity of smoking."

Such an invitation was not to be refused lightly. I accepted the proffered cigar accordingly, took the chair indicated by a wave of Mr. Thomas' hand and prepared to await developments, Mr. Willard, meanwhile, beginning to pace restlessly about the room and having frequent recourse to his cigar lighter.

Being acquainted with the methods of my chief, I was not in the least surprised at what followed, but I verily thought that our client would go mad with impatience.

Mr. Thomas turned to his desk, deliberately opened and read a letter, rang for his secretary, dictated an answer, and then turning, regarded me in silence for a full moment. I glanced at Mr. Willard fully expecting him to explode.

Finally my chief spoke quietly.

"What you may learn here this morning, Mr. Shaw, we shall expect you to regard as told in the strictest confidence. Whether we do or do not decide to call upon you further in this matter, you will, of course, refrain from mentioning this conference or its purport to a person. That is understood."

I effected something between a nod and bow of assent.

"I am somewhat acquainted with your antecedents. Your good father is a warm friend of mine, and I may say that during the years that you have been associated with me I have seen nothing to indicate that you are not a worthy representative of a splendid family."

At these unexpected words of commendation, I felt my face grow red with embarrassed pleasure. Praise from Cæsar was praise indeed, and Mr. Thomas was never noted for fulsome flattery.

"First, I want to ask you a few, perhaps unusual, questions about yourself, if you do not object."

The last sentence was spoken with a rising inflection and I bowed again, concealing as well as I could my astonishment at this decidedly unusual opening to a legal conference.

"If I recall correctly, you went to Harvard and the Harvard Law School?" Again I gave my assent. "And I have been given to understand that you may be called the society member of our office," he continued with a twinkle in his eye.

I laughed with embarrassment, replying, "I'm afraid that I cannot lay much claim to such a reputation, sir, even if I should care to. My successes in that line, if any, are pretty well restricted to the narrow limits of my home town."

"I hope that you will pardon my apparent curiosity but,— you sing, I believe?"

"Yes, sir, a little."

"Play golf, tennis, and all that sort of thing?"

This time my assent was more unqualifiedly given for although I was no Travers or Larned, I held my ability in sport in rather high regard, and a recent triumph on the courts over Mr. Willard himself lent some color to my high opinion of my skill as a racket wielder.

"Dance?"

"Yes, sir."

"In short, you are fairly well supplied with all the social graces."

I did not know whether to take this as a compliment or the reverse, so wisely said nothing in reply.

"Are you acquainted with Newport?"

"Somewhat, sir. I have played several times in the National tennis championship there, and know the city fairly well."

"How about the summer society folks? The 'four hundred,' I believe they are sometimes called."

By this time my previous astonishment over his peculiar questions had shrunk into insignificance, but, in as matter a fact manner as possible, I answered, "If I can claim acquaintance with any of them it is extremely limited. I knew a few of my own generation at college, but can scarcely claim intimacy with any of them."

"Conversely they would not know you intimately, or know of your connection with this office. That is excellent," he added, nodding.

"Are you familiar with the so-called 'cottages' along Bellevue Avenue and the cliffs?"

"Oh, I know most of them by name, of course. I have taken friends on the Ocean Drive with the local jehus and have had them pointed out to me a number of times."

"Have you the entrée to any of them?"

At this I could not help laughing outright. "Certainly not in the manner your question suggests, Mr. Thomas. I've been inside 'The Breakers' on one or two occasions at charity bazaars and plays, and once I went through the Gilman residence on Bellevue Avenue."

At this statement Mr. Willard stopped his pacing abruptly and asked in a startled voice, "What was the occasion of *that* visit?"

"Well, I'm not sure that it was altogether creditable to me, Mr. Willard. It came about as the result of a wager I once made with a tennis friend when I was considerably younger than I am now. We had been commenting none too politely upon the society of Newport as a close corporation, and he finally bet that I could not, without introduction, gain access to one of their homes and go all over it. I won the wager, that's all."

"How?" interrupted my chief, with a slight show of interest.

"It was really largely a matter of luck. I heard that there was to be a big reception at the Gilman residence the next night, and, with more nerve than modesty, seized the occasion when the decorators were at work, to enter and gratuitously help direct the arrangements. The workmen evidently thought that I was one of the household, and the family and servants took the opposite view, apparently

taking it for granted that I was in charge of the work, I made suggestions so liberally. At any rate I saw the palace from garret to cellar. And I remember that I was rather proud of the finished decorations."

The unusual trend of these questions had now put me on my mettle, and as I finished this story I saw a glance pass between Mr. Thomas and his client, and, out of the tail of my eye, caught the latter's nod of assent, and I saw his lips form the words, "He'll do."

Another moment's pause succeeded. Then Mr. Thomas said abruptly, "You are perhaps aware, Mr. Shaw, that Mr. Willard was married a fortnight ago."

"Yes, sir, I read with interest the account of his marriage at the time. May I tender my belated congratulations, sir?" I added, addressing the bridegroom, but as I did so I noticed that Mr. Thomas' hand was raised slightly from his desk as though in warning, and the look of pain which passed over Mr. Willard's countenance told me that for some, to me unknown, reason, I had put my foot in it.

My chief terminated the awkward silence which ensued after my commonplace though apparently inopportune remark, by saying,

"Friend Willard is, I am sure, to be congratu-

lated, although just at the present moment, there is a little cloud temporarily obscuring the sunlight of his felicity."

"'A little cloud!' My God, Thomas, do you call this thing *little!*" burst out the latter vehemently, his voice trembling with pent-up emotion.

Without answering him, and without comment, the chief passed me a letter which bore the caption of one of the leading firms of attorneys in New York and was dated the previous week.

It ran:

"Roland Lawrence Willard, Esq.,
—— Beacon Street,
Boston, Massachusetts.

"Dear sir:

"It is with the greatest regret that we find it encumbent upon us to advise you that your wife, Margaret Lee Willard, has retained us for the purpose of bringing against you a libel for divorce.

"We may say that this contemplated move on her part is taken against our advice, and that we are writing you on our own initiative.

"Were she to know of this action, it would undoubtedly meet with her disapprobation. We feel, however, that under the exceptional circumstances which exist, it is only right to inform you of the situation before the libel is entered, so that you may have an opportunity for effecting a reconciliation, if such is possible and should be your desire.

"Mrs. Willard alleges as cause for her action, cruel

and abusive treatment suffered by her upon the day of your wedding, as a result of which, as you are aware, she left you that afternoon. We must further advise you that, in our opinion, the facts which she sets forth are, from a legal standpoint, sufficient to constitute cause for divorce, yet we cannot help but believe that your actions, of which she complains, are capable of some explanation, and should not be used as the basis for such a serious breach as she is contemplating.

"You will, we are sure, regard this letter as strictly confidential, inasmuch as it contains matters which may be regarded as privileged communications between client and attorneys, but the circumstances are so unusual that we feel justified in taking this course of action.

"Very truly yours,

"ABBOTT, BROWN AND CUMMINGS."

The astonishing contents of this epistle surprised me beyond words, the more so because the fact was borne in upon my mind that two whole weeks had elapsed since Mrs. Willard left her husband, and not a word had been printed or whispered in contradiction of the report that the happy pair were on their honeymoon on the broad Atlantic. Nevertheless, I managed to conceal my amazement, and after reading the letter through, very carefully, a second time, handed it back in silence.

My chief regarded me quizzically for an instant, then said,

"This disclosure causes you no surprise, Mr.

Shaw?" and smiled appreciatively when I responded, "I have schooled myself never to show astonishment over anything I may see or hear in this office, sir."

At this juncture, Mr. Willard, who had been pacing about the room like a caged animal until it was getting on my nerves, broke in again.

"Oh, I can't stand this, Thomas! You tell him about the whole cursed mess, and I'll talk it over with him later, if you think there's any use." Nervously putting on a long dust cloak and a pair of huge dark auto glasses, he hurriedly left the room, to my relief.

By this time my curiosity was naturally at a boiling point, but once more I had to wait with an outward show of unconcern while Mr. Thomas leaned back in his chair, placed the tips of his fingers against each other with great solemnity — an old trick of his when thinking deeply — and studied my face intently.

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH I AM TOLD A SECRET

"DID it ever occur to you, Shaw," began Mr. Thomas at length, "that we lawyers are constantly running across situations which most strikingly bear out the trite but true adage that 'truth is stranger than fiction'?"

"The average persons saturate their minds with the latest novels and then complain bitterly that real life is a dull, monotonous and uninteresting thing, willfully blind to the fact that, on the contrary, it is simply teeming with romance.

"The commonplace appearing man who sits opposite you in the street car, the tired-looking shop girl, who waits on you over the counter daily, may be living out a romance or deep in the throes of a moral problem story which your author of the latest 'best seller' would gladly give a thousand dollars to know about.

"Every day of your life you listen to the same sort of wit and wisdom that you read in your favorite fiction. All the writer does is, after all, to condense and eliminate the unessential.

"I'm not much on poetry. Don't have time. But one verse which I read some years ago, and the author of which I have forgotten, if I ever knew, has stuck. 'This life is so full of a number of things that I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings'— if kings ever are happy.

"Take, for example, this present 'mess,' as Willard terms it.

"I don't know yet whether it is going to turn out a tragedy or a comedy, but what a situation it would make for your skilled writer-man.

"A wealthy, handsome and popular man of society — our friend Willard — still a bachelor at thirty-eight, meets a beautiful young orphan, Miss Margaret Lee, a Virginia girl of splendid stock, and possessed of considerable property herself. She is little more than a child — just passed twenty, I believe — and, from what I can gather, quite a different sort from the average débutante one meets in New York or even in Boston. Indeed, Willard admits that notwithstanding her exceptional beauty, her chief charm for him lay in her unsophistication, and sweet and childlike innocence.

"It was a case of love at first sight, at least on his part, for he was mad about her from the start. From all reports, his courtship was as impetuous as his polo playing, and since he embodies all that is regarded as fine and attractive in a man, it is

scarcely to be wondered at that she surrendered shortly.

"A few weeks after the engagement was announced they were married at the residence of the Gilmans in New York, Mr. Gilman having been one of her late father's most intimate friends and business associates. The wedding was small and very quiet, for the Lee girls — there are two sisters, Margaret and Marion — were not widely acquainted in the metropolis, and, moreover, still in mourning for their brother who had died only a few months previous.

"Immediately after the wedding breakfast the party went on board Willard's steam yacht, *The Enchantress,* which was moored at the New York Yacht Club pier.

"The next incident in our story is still somewhat cloudy, for the recollection of the hero — or villain, as the case may be — is very hazy about it, for he admits that he had unfortunately looked upon the wine when it was red over-often at the breakfast and afterwards on board, although he will not bring himself to acknowledge that he was actually intoxicated.

"However that may have been, he followed his newly-made bride down into the main cabin after the guests had departed, and apparently attempted to become too affectionate to suit his wife; in short,

to kiss her without her consent. In his condition it did not occur to him, he says, that his bride could have had any really serious objections to his having drunk more than was altogether good for him, since she came from a section where heavy drinking is — or rather was — considered a manly virtue and quite the usual thing. At any rate, under the impression that she was not really in earnest in repelling his advances, or laboring under the false assumption that every woman adores a masterful man — he *must* have been drunk — he attempted to take a kiss by force.

"She fought back like a wildcat, and, forgetful for the moment how very powerful he, and how slight and girlish she, was, he may have used more force than he realizes and have actually hurt her, although he won't even now admit the possibility of such a thing.

"She finally managed to break away from him and ran and locked herself in her cabin.

"Some time later, when *The Enchantress* was well down the harbor, and he, having had time to cool down a bit, sought her again to apologize and 'make up,'— she was gone."

"Great Scott," I ejaculated.

"There, you see?" replied my chief, smiling, "and I am only giving you a bald statement of facts, without attempting to dress them up with any

of the embellishments that a writer would employ in working up his plot.

"Willard was naturally wild with anxiety. Upon questioning the captain he learned that just before they cast off, a young woman, heavily veiled, had left the yacht hurriedly, but his informer merely thought that she was Mrs. Willard's sister who he knew had stayed aboard after the other guests had left.

"*The Enchantress* was immediately put about on the pretext, as the other members of the crew were to be told, that business matters had caused a temporary change of plans, and after dark Willard went ashore. The captain, who is an exceptional man, one who may be relied upon to obey orders, was instructed to proceed to Naples and there await the arrival of the owner and his bride next month.

"As you may imagine, Willard was about frantic, but, even so, he had sense enough to decide that he must locate his truant bride secretly if possible, desiring to avoid all publicity as much for her sake as his own. For the past fortnight the poor fellow has been keeping himself out of sight like a hunted criminal, living in a small out-of-the-way apartment, and disguising himself as you saw him just now whenever a clew to her whereabouts necessitated his appearing in any place where he might

be recognized. If the matter were not so serious it would be ludicrous, would it not?

"His first step, after consulting me, was to engage the services of a leading firm of private detectives, and to furnish them with a list of places where, and names of people with whom, his wife might possibly have taken refuge. Among them was that of the Gilmans — which accounts for Willard's peculiar interest when you mentioned having gone through their residence. He knew that her sister Marion was to have gone with them to Newport immediately after the wedding, and there, several days later, the detective located Margaret, like himself, in deep seclusion. Willard, incognito, followed her there at once, but she absolutely refused to see him or listen to a word of explanation from him. Then he tried writing to her but his letters were all returned unopened or unread.

"In the meanwhile came this letter from her attorneys in New York. I went to see them with him immediately, and we talked over the matters at length. As an upshot of our conference they willingly agreed to intercede on his behalf, but a few days later telephoned to report their complete failure. She was still utterly obdurate, even threatening to dismiss them and retain other and less conscientious counsel — and, needless to say, there are plenty who would give their eye teeth to get

hold of this case for the advertisement there would be in it.

"Then, at my suggestion, Willard broke his deep silence by taking one of his most intimate friends into his confidence, and the latter attempted to act as a go-between and reason with Mrs. Willard. He did succeed in reaching her, but met with a mighty chilly reception, and the moment he mentioned her husband's name and attempted to plead for him, she left the room, and, try as he would, he couldn't succeed in seeing her again.

"This is a queer old world, isn't it? This thing seems almost incredible, and yet, the way matters stand now, this seemingly insignificant act on Willard's part begins to look as though it were going to wreck his whole life — and hers as well. Why, you and I know Willard, and know that he isn't a rake or a drunkard. Indeed he's a splendid chap, infinitely better and cleaner than the majority of his set. Wouldn't it be the very irony of fate if this slip ruins his whole happiness?

"As far as I can make out, the whole trouble grew from the fact that Mrs. Willard is not only very young and unsophisticated, but a descendant of an old Southern family of hotheads, to all of whom, back in the days before the war at least, even a fancied insult was the signal for a duel to death, and this fiery trait has not yet been eradi-

cated from the splendid blood which runs in her veins."

"But that fact doesn't excuse her unreasonable attitude now," I broke in. "He has shown clearly enough that he is penitent, and she has no right not to give him at least a hearing. What the little spitfire needs is a good old-fashioned spanking."

Mr. Thomas smiled a little at my youthful arrogance, but replied, "Perhaps you're right. That might be the solution, but, as the Welsh say in their receipt for rabbit stew, 'First catch your hare,' and that's just what we haven't succeeded in doing — yet.

"You see, we have apparently come to an impasse, and, moreover, there now comes the unsatisfactory report from the detective that both Mrs. Willard and her sister have left the Gilmans' roof, although they still seem to be somewhere in Newport, for he has seen at least one of them several times recently, still heavily veiled. Somehow or other she has eluded our sleuth, and he 'regrets to report' that he has not yet discovered their present abiding place."

At the close of this surprising story I sat silent, astonished not only at the account, but by my chief's attitude. I had never seen him unbend or take so much sympathetic and human interest in anything before, and I doubted if any one else had.

At last I said, "But I don't just see where I fit into this extraordinary tangle. Of course, if you think that I can be of any use to you or Mr. Willard, I should be more than happy to, Mr. Thomas."

He regarded me thoughtfully again for a space, then said:

"As you see, the situation as it now stands is this: Mrs. Willard is obdurate, Mr. Willard has failed to move her, her own attorneys have failed, his intimate friend has failed, I have failed, for my letters to her met with the same sort of reception as his."

I nodded.

"It seems that it would be utterly futile to try again any of the methods which we have employed in the past, at least if she continues to maintain her present attitude toward her husband. If she should voluntarily change her mind, why, well and good, but there seems to be little likelihood of that, and we are not yet ready to give up the fight.

"I am frank to say that I am puzzled how to proceed. Mr. Willard still insists upon the utmost secrecy. We have this thing in our favor, however, the New York attorneys promise to take no overt action until we have had a reasonable time to make every possible attempt to effect an understanding, and to let us know in advance when they are forced to proceed. Now, there may be noth-

ing in this plan of mine, but although it is considerably removed from ordinary legal methods, it might bear fruit. It is this, in short: You say that you are fairly well acquainted in Newport, that you already know, at least slightly, a few of the summer residents, but not too well. I mean by that, that if you should gain an introduction to the people who are harboring the Lee girls now, the chances would be all against any of them knowing that you are even acquainted with Willard, or associated with his counsel. If she is still in that city, you, with the help of the detective, might reasonably be expected to discover her hiding-place. That accomplished, I have every confidence in your ability to gain an acquaintance with the family with whom she is staying, especially as we can provide you with letters of introduction to several of the leaders in Newport society. If you are successful in this, the next step will be to become acquainted, and then on friendly terms with the young vixen herself, and to this end I am counting on your social accomplishments. I haven't the faintest idea just how that desired result is to be brought about. That is distinctly up to you. But you get my idea? I want you, by whatever means you may find available, to gain the friendship of Margaret Willard, and then, using your own judgment as to the method to be pursued, win her over and ef-

fect a reconciliation between her and her husband.

"I need hardly say that such a task will require the most infinite care, patience and tact on your part, should you decide to undertake it, and that there is a great deal at stake. Will you attempt it?"

Such an astonishing request, which gave promise of a most unusual and interesting adventure in my wholly uneventful life, coming like a thunderclap out of a clear sky, left me in a momentary daze.

Kaleidoscopic thoughts concerning the possible romance in the situation, the prospect of another semi-vacation, the splendid service I would be rendering if I succeeded and its influence on my future, and — most of all, it must be admitted — the recollection of my desk in the other office piled high with work, work, work, raced through my mind.

The last thought settled it.

I rose, and, utterly forgetful of whom I was addressing, and of my own professional dignity, said succinctly, "I'm on!"

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH I TOIL NOT, NEITHER DO I SPIN

THIRTY-SIX hours after making this momentous decision, one which was in fact — although I did not then realize it, of course — to change the whole current of my life, I found myself installed at the Meunchinger-King in the summer capital of America's Four Hundred, to all intents and purposes a young gentleman of leisure, certainly a new man, at least I was nothing less, if the ancient saw about clothes making the man is to be accredited.

On the morning of the day previous I had considered, and would have said unhesitatingly, that no man could have been busier than I. Foolish assumption, as I was shortly to learn.

The eighteen working hours which had intervened between that moment when I left Mr. Thomas' private office, and the one when I boarded the train for Newport, seemed to me in retrospect like an impossible nightmare. Yet during them, I, the central figure in the mad scramble and rush of preparation, did little or nothing of my own initiative. From a thinking, acting agent, I had suddenly be-

come changed to — and was to remain for many a day — a helpless though animate shuttlecock in the moving hand of Fate.

Scarcely had I spoken the words which were to turn my life into a new and unsuspected channel, when Mr. Willard hurriedly reëntered my chief's office, saying, "Well, Thomas, what is the decision?"

The latter briefly summed up our conversation and announced my willingness to do what I could, and our client gripped my hand hard. Turning to me, Mr. Thomas added, "From now on until your mission is accomplished, Shaw, or until you are relieved from duty, you will be wholly under friend Willard's direction. And now, as it happens that I'm already twelve minutes late in keeping an appointment in the judges' lobby, I'll leave you two together here to formulate your plans of campaign. I assume that you can start at once, Mr. Shaw."

I made some half-hearted objections concerning my desk load of work needing to be done, but he swept them aside, saying, "Never mind that. This present matter is of primary importance, and I will have it understood that you have been commandeered by me for a personal case, and that your other duties will have to rest. Anyway, I have, for some time past, been considering the desirability of having another young man come into the office to

aid with the routine work, and have one in mind, who will be glad to come in immediately, I imagine," at which news my heart sent out a pean of thanksgiving.

Mr. Willard's earnest conference with me lasted fully an hour, and during it we spelt out, step by step, my proposed method of procedure; discussed at length every conceivable contingency which we could imagine might arise during the progress of my mission, and constructed our plans to meet them.

First of all, Mr. Willard insisted that I resign my position in the office, saying, "It is, of course, all essential that the fact that you are a friend of mine or associated with my attorney be carefully concealed, so that no chance remark, even, put Mrs. Willard on her guard, and if you are to play your part with the proper conviction you must be wholly free from the necessity of prevaricating, no matter how mildly."

With some inward amusement I assented, for, after all, it seemed to me that this would merely be beating the devil around the bush, since, obviously, I could get my place back again later. When I suggested this fact, however, my new employer gave me some food for thought by saying, "I know that, but if you succeed in this matter, which has become so vital to me and my happiness, you will very likely not care to avail yourself of that oppor-

tunity. I think that my affairs warrant my engaging a private secretary, or, perhaps I had better say, a personal legal representative."

He likewise made it clear that, although he would expect me to report my progress to him from time to time, he had no intentions of interfering or even making further suggestions. I was to run my own course unhampered.

To give color to what might prove to be a somewhat prolonged stay in Newport, we decided that I should enter and play in the National All-comers tennis tournament, which, most opportunely, was to begin a week from the following Monday, and to give me the "open sesame" to the society in which our quarry would probably be found, he was to — and later did — supply me with several letters of introduction, indicted by that friend who was already in his full confidence.

"Now," continued Mr. Willard, at last, "since we must leave no stone unturned in providing against every contingency, I want to ask you a few frank questions about your externals," and there followed an exhaustive cross examination, during the course of which my interrogator displayed the keenness of business acumen for which he was noted.

He subjected to a searching X-ray examination such intimately personal matters as my worldly pos-

sessions, income and wearing apparel, and not until that moment had I ever realized how pitiable meager they were — at least from the standpoint of a man of wealth and high social standing.

I must admit that before he began to dissect them ruthlessly, I had always regarded my thirty-five dollars a week and occasional fees from personal cases not at all a bad income for a young man but three years out of the law school, and looked upon my clothing as excellent; indeed, at home I had more than once been dubbed the "Beau Brummel" of the town. But before his catechism was over I had begun to feel, instead of a sense of self-satisfaction over my possessions, that I should at that moment be standing on some street corner holding forth my cap for alms, with my poor rags a source of shame and ignominy.

However, this matter could be more lightly dismissed than the others, according to Mr. Willard, who, accordingly, did dismiss it lightly by saying, "Well, we mustn't overlook the slightest detail which might cast even the shadow of a doubt upon your implied claim to the position of a young man of means and leisure, for in appearing as such lies your one hope of getting in on the inside at Newport, as you know. My wife has been staying, and very likely still is, with one of the richest families in America, and, undemocratic though it may sound,

the fact remains that with most of that crowd the only sure method of gaining admission to their innermost circles is by means of a golden key.

"I will place to your credit in the bank a sum sufficiently large to cover all your immediate necessary expenses, and shall expect you to call on me unhesitatingly for more should the need arise. And, while we are on this subject, I want to warn you that you have got to be a free spender. If you have any habits of economy fixed upon you, as laudable as these are in the abstract, you have to unlearn them for the time being; and that may not be as easy as it sounds, either. You see, I am a New Englander, too. But this is a case where good business demands not thrift but prodigality.

"As to your clothing," he added, "we need give that no further consideration. I'll turn you over to the tender mercies of my man, Jamieson, who, by the way, is quite a wonder. He will enjoy nothing more than having the *cart blanche* to rig you out in up-to-the-minute apparel. Don't get the idea, old man, that I am casting any reflections upon your own ability to dress well, but Jamieson is the highest court of appeal in matters pertaining to wearing apparel, and has 'What's What in Togs' at his tongue's end. He is my own brains in these matters and can save you much valuable time.

"Now, I want to tell you all that I can about

my wife, for any information of this nature may come in very handy later. Here is her picture." He drew from his pocket a kodak snapshot of a girl so lovely that even that inadequate method of portrayal seemed as though it must flatter the original.

It was taken on their marriage day apparently, for she was in bridal attire. Her veil was so filmy that it appeared scarcely more than a mist over a mass of dark hair done like a coronet high on her head; her face — a perfect oval with large expressive eyes and a sensitive mouth — bore a serious expression which gave the impression of character to the somewhat childlike beauty, and she was apparently slender and not over medium height.

I returned the picture after a moment. There was no need of retaining it. I would know that face again anywhere.

He regarded it in silence and then said quietly, "That is Margaret. Her sister Marion looks strikingly like her, 'though somewhat younger. They are twenty and nineteen years old respectively, both essentially frank, unaffected and out-of-doors sport-loving girls, light-hearted and merry by nature, but of late their life has been saddened first by the death of their father about three years ago, then by that of their mother a year later, and only this spring their only brother died, leaving them

practically alone in the world. By these three deaths the two sisters came into the possession of a very considerable fortune carefully invested, and a large estate in Fairdale, near Petersburg, Virginia."

He hesitated, then added, "I cannot believe but that Margaret did love me. I will not pretend, however, that her grief over these sad losses, and the fact that she was left practically alone, did not have something to do with our early marriage."

I expressed my sympathy as well as I could in a few carefully chosen words, and our conference was ended.

After calling up my home on the long distance telephone and telling my mother that, for a period of unknown duration, I could not be counted upon for my usual week-end visits, since I was making a trip for the chief, I prepared to accompany Mr. Willard to his secluded lodgings.

And so it came about by a queer twist of fate, that, little more than an hour from the time that I had opened my desk, my vacation ended, and, over my head in work, had sat there inwardly roundly cursing at the cruel fortune which held me a slave to the exacting and ungrateful firm of Thomas, Richards and Henry, in that sweltering heat, I passed down the office corridor with barely one gloating glance into my prison chamber, and so

out of the door on which appeared my own name in lowly position, never to enter it again as a member of the office force.

A closed taxicab bore us speedily to our destination. There Mr. Willard spoke a few final words of instruction, admonition and hope. I gave him my pledge that — D. V.— I would not fail in my great mission, and received his earnest assurance that he really believed that I would succeed. His returning confidence was further evidenced by his hearty handclasp, infinitely cooler and firmer than the one with which he had greeted me that morning, and my heart glowed at his words of implicit faith and trust in me.

Then the accomplished Jamieson was summoned and presented, and immediately I sunk from my exalted estate of trusted friend and counselor to a position of insignificant nonentity.

I can scarcely think of Jamieson as a personality. He was merely a type. Call to mind your own conception of an English valet and you have him.

I towered above him by nearly a foot; I knew myself far his superior in birth, brains and estate; yet before I had passed an hour in his company I felt like a mere nobody. Indeed, after twelve hours spent in desperate endeavor to meet the pace he set, I mentally assented without reservation to Mr. Willard's remark that Jamieson was quite a wonder in

his way. Likewise, to the phrase "The Lord pity the poor rich"— at least if they are all afflicted with such superior man servants as this.

During those dozen hours spent in my company he bowed servilely at least a thousand times — or so it seemed to me — said, "Yes, sir," "Thank you, sir," and "Quite so, sir," fully a million, yet the whole time managing to convey the impression that he regarded the performance of his duty as a very great condescension on his part, and me as a poor untutored savage, pitiably ignorant on that all absorbing and important topic, "What's What in Togs," as indeed I was.

It may be, as 'tis said, that no man is a hero to his own valet, but the present instance furnished the exception which proved the rule then. In Jamieson's eyes, Roland Willard was undoubtedly quite the paragon of all created beings, and, by inference, I gained the impression that he did not consider me as worthy of a place upon the same earth with him.

Not since that time (some twenty-four years previous), when as a small lad of four I had been tied to a nurse's apron strings, had I ever been so completely personally conducted.

The humbling process started as soon as we reached my "rooms,"— they consisted of a medium-sized living-room or den, and a bedroom about

the size of a postage stamp. Jamieson sniffed audibly as we entered, but discreetly covered his slip by blowing his nose violently. Then, recovering his poise, he suggested that he be allowed to glance over my wardrobe as a preliminary to our shopping excursion, saying, deferentially, "H'it might be well, sir, for me to know just 'ow you h'are fitted h'out, before miking h'any suggestions h'as to possible h'additions to your h'apparel, sir."

When, with many inward misgivings, I granted him the permission asked, he thanked me as effusively as though I had just given him the whole outfit — which he probably wouldn't have taken, even as a gift.

Had my self-esteem as a well-dresser not been undergoing a series of rude, perhaps fatal, shocks, I am sure I should have found the examination which ensued ludicrous in the extreme. He pawed over my meager belongings with such a shocked expression upon his countenance, and indulged in so many shakes of the head and grieved cluckings of the tongue, that I almost saw once more my rock of refuge at Harvard when funds had vanished, Max Keezer, old clothes merchant, and half expected him to say any moment, "I can't gif you a cent over tirteen dollars for the lot, and I'm taking the bread out of my children's mouths to do that."

"HE PAWED OVER MY MEAGER BELONGINGS"

The final result of his heart-to-heart interview with my clothing was summed up briefly in the words, "Wery nice, sir, but not 'ardly h'altogether suitable for your present wisit, h'I should say"—he pronounced it "sigh," and the tone of his voice indicated that his feelings coincided with the word.

"H'if h'it meets with your h'approval, sir" (my approval indeed, what had I to say about it?) "we might start at the beginning, thenk you, sir." And at the beginning we verily did start.

The taxicab was again requisitioned and we were whirled off down town. Then commenced a series of brilliant raids and sorties through the shopping district, in which Jamieson acted as commander-in-chief, and I, the balance of the "light-brigade," whose duty was not to reason why, make reply, only to do or die.

My companion was in his element, displaying a wonderful command over his subject, and I made no suggestions, for I was sure that he would ignore them if I did. Without a pause, 'though never ceasing to lament over the lack of time which prohibited my having a complete outfit tailor-made, he rushed me from boot shop to haberdashery, from haberdashery to clothing house, never failing to pick out the most expensive one, or select the highest-priced garment or article therein.

For a brief time I protested against the lavish-

ness and extravagance of his purchases, thereby fulfilling to the letter Mr. Willard's prophecy that my habits of economy would die hard, but Jamieson finally silenced me with the crushing reply, "H'orders is h'orders, sir, an' Mr. Willard h'expressly said, 'Nothin' but the best h'obtainable, sir.'"

Fortunately, for my own sake and Jamieson's mental condition, I was of normal build, with proportions which conformed very closely to those prescribed for a six-footer by the makers of styles, and, as a result, no long delays were necessitated.

As time wore on, and my purchasing agent continued to drum into me incessantly that Mr. Willard would actually be incensed if I failed in a single detail to have my equipment perfect, even the last scruple of my New England conscience vanished, and I found myself ordering a complete new set of golf clubs, and not one, but two, of my favorite eight-dollar tennis rackets.

I say, without exaggeration, that I believe this shopping expedition of ours established a world's record which may last for all time, a record to fill the soul of the most expert and energetic woman bargain-day fiend with envy,— a high water-mark to be striven for but never attained.

To my keen amusement I shortly began to notice, moreover, that as the day passed and my capacity as a spender, and with it my worldly possessions,

increased, Jamieson's attitude toward me began to undergo a marked and steady reversal. By the afternoon of our second day he had become as respectful and servile even as the most exacting plutocrat could have desired, and when he finally parted from me with a fast "Thenk you, sir," his hand tightly clasping my small tribute to his wonderful ability, I indulged in a hearty laugh.

"Verily," thought I, "the worshipers of Baal and the Golden Calf are by no means all dead yet. Jamieson has personally constructed his own idol and then fallen down and worshiped it."

Before the sun had set behind Beacon Hill on this, the second day of my great adventure, a train was bearing me speedily southward toward Newport, and, in the baggage car ahead, reposed two brand new trunks and a suitcase, all judiciously marred, dented, be-labeled, and inscribed with the motto, "J. A. S., Boston," packed to their capacity with a complete and high-priced wardrobe from underwear to overcoat, tennis, golf and riding costumes, formal and informal evening regalia, boots, shoes, hats, caps and every possible accessory — in fact more apparel than I had possessed in all my life together, it seemed to me — certainly more than I could hope to wear in a year.

And thus it happened that upon the evening of that August day I sat on the veranda of the

Meunchinger-King a new man, although in achieving that result I had, myself, neither toiled nor spun, and certainly Solomon, in all his glory, was never arrayed like unto me.

CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH ARE RECORDED A FEW IMPRESSIONS

NEWPORT, city of continual contrasts!

I had made no misstatement in saying to Mr. Thomas that I was well acquainted with it. During my three previous visits to this fascinating old town — for, after all, despite its size and form of government, it is scarce else — whither I had gone to participate in the national tennis championship, I had come to find that it had a peculiar appeal for me. Excepting my own city of Boston, no other place that I had visited had ever drawn me so irresistibly, or made me feel so soon like "one of the family"— I am speaking now of the city itself, not that portion which has achieved world fame as the summer home of America's aristocracy of dollars. Was it, perchance, the result of a subconscious presentiment of what was one day to befall me here?

And where, after all, is there to be found a city quite like it, so full of inherent charm, strange anomalies, and bewildering contrasts?

As I sat upon the veranda of the Meunchinger-King that evening, musing on the strange circum-

stance which had brought me there so unexpectedly, and looking up Bellevue Avenue toward Touro Park with its historic old stone mill, famed in picture and story as a relic of some wandering Norseman's visit, my mind's eye saw, not one, but two cities, utterly distinct the one from the other in personality and appearance, yet as irrevocably bound together and dependent upon each other as the Siamese twins.

To the right and below me — across the beautiful boulevard which marks the ending of the old, the beginning of the new — lay the quaint and fascinating Newport of history, a city still permeated with the spirit of Colonial days. I did not need to wait for the daylight to see it; my mind visualized it plainly, rising sharply from the harbor front along which ran the narrow, fascinating Thames Street, oldest avenue in America, the steep ascent made by many still narrower cross ways, most of which bore good old Christian names — John, William, Anne, Mary — and all bordered by venerable hoary trees, and little old-time houses whose miniature front porches or steps trespass boldly upon the already crowded and uneven sidewalks. Antique shops, old churches and burial grounds, sites of historic memories were there in numbers I knew, and only an occasional jarring note broke the quiet harmony — the inevitable " movie " house

or some ultra modern building like the magnificent Y. M. C. A. club house, then being built for the sailor boys who nightly filled the town from the nearby training school, torpedo station or battleships.

I knew it well, and loved it, too. But this was only one part of Newport, the unobtrusive quiet part, which hibernates during the winter months only to awake with spring and prepare to fatten upon its other half, when summer brings the transient birds of paradise which are supposed to shed their golden feathers so lavishly. Supposed? Let it be whispered underneath the breath that sometimes they migrate southward to New York, leaving more unpaid bills than golden plumage, 'tis said.

I swung the searchlight of my mind to the left and over that other half, and lo! there is wrought a change more instantaneous, more astonishing, than ever Aladdin with his wonderful lamp could have effected. It is a different world.

Before me, close at hand, stood one outpost of the old order, the historic library behind its majestic spreading redwood trees, but shortly appeared the advance guard of the new in the form of scattering shops and offices, branches, many of them, of the leading Metropolitan houses. A little further my mental vision saw the world-famous Casino, summer playhouse of America's monied pleas-

ure pursuers, and then, beyond it and beyond, out to the awe-inspiring cliffs which, two miles further away, beetle over the broad Atlantic, and to right and left along these magnificent walls of seamed and craggy rocks, palaces and mansions of marble, brick and stone, vieing with one another and with nature's building, in impressive grandeur and magnificence.

Like a broad unrolling ribbon of dark satin lay beautiful Bellevue Avenue, acme of the road builders' art, by day and night the thoroughfare for hundreds upon hundreds of imposing equipages and motor cars with their liveried attendants, each bearing some man, woman — or child — whose name and fame was country wide. On either side stood the wonderful "cottages"— ironical description — each flanked by broad acres and perfect hedges of privet (and where else grows privet so luxuriantly?), extensive lawns, lovely fields, mighty trees, God and man in harmonic partnership producing an earthly paradise.

Many a time and oft had I walked the length of this avenue, and one way or the other along the cliff path, my soul drinking in the constantly unfolding beauties. Envious I may have been at times, but never begrudging. I was no socialist, and these external evidences of the power of gold, instead of producing any bitterness within me, thrilled me, and

gave birth to glowing thoughts. I built many an air castle upon some vacant spot upon this Bellevue Avenue or the Ocean Drive, and ah, the day-dreams I indulged in over that imaginary time in the dim future when my ship should come in, for thought is free — even in Newport — and 'though the monied power can, and does erect about itself and its possessions barriers impassable to all save the favored few who hold the golden key, it cannot keep on the outside the man blessed with imagination.

The old city I already knew as a friend always ready to meet my advances half way, but the new was still a beautiful but haughty stranger, to be gazed upon with admiration, nothing more.

So much for the past. Did the future, the next few days or weeks in fact, hold anything different for me? Was this year to bring a total readjustment in the aspect? Was I indeed destined to see the brazen gates swing open before me? Was I at last to enter the charmed precinct of this kingdom of the world, and, for a time at least, to play my part in company with those resplendent creatures set apart from the common herd?

Thus I sat and dreamed dreams and saw visions for a time, but soon a less pleasant thought crept into my imaginings. Even if I should find my lot cast in these pleasant places, it would only be for

the moment and all play-acting on my part. I was not sent to Newport to tread the primrose path of dalliance, but to perform, as a matter of pure business, a difficult and delicate task. I must needs banish fond dreaming and be up and about my mission.

Mentally shaking myself together, I went inside and telephoned to my co-worker, Mr. Willard's sleuth, whom, I had been advised, was stopping at the United States Hotel on Thames Street.

Fortune favored, he was in, and, not caring to be seen in his company at my hotel, I arranged to meet him at his, for a conference later that evening.

The clock was striking nine when I sallied forth, plenty of time for a walk down the familiar street before entering upon my real labors, and, in a few minutes, I was passing beneath the arch of the Casino and into that artistic rambling Norman structure, greeting a former acquaintance here and there among the gatemen, and on into the inclosed courtyard.

There in the central pavilion was the splendid orchestra — symphony players all during the winter months — deep in one of the numbers of the midweek concert.

How natural it all seemed, for during previous visits I had never missed one of these concerts if I could help it. The pavilion brilliantly lighted,

the mystic glow from a string of Japanese lanterns beyond, fading quickly into darkness which shrouded the tennis courts, the illumined face of the clock in the turret above me on the left, the pleasant " feel " of the velvety turf underfoot, the liquid strains of music on the soft night air, the fair women in evening attire, strolling about or seated, all combined to create an atmosphere whose effect was as potent as wine, and my heart warmed at the thought that I was a part of it all.

The selection which the orchestra was playing was unfamiliar to me. I glanced at my program, found the number, and suddenly my self-satisfied contentment vanished, and a chill ran through me akin to the physical sensation arising from an unexpected douse of ice cold water, for the words I read were, " Selections from The Impostor."

I do not know why, at this moment, the mere suggestion arising from that final word should have sent my soaring spirits hurtling earthward, unless the nervous tension of the past day or two, and the unconscious realization of the magnitude of my undertaking, had keyed my sensibilities up unnaturally.

But the fact is that I mentally recoiled as though from a blow.

Was this a writing on the wall, a mystic warning to me for my presumptuous dreams? Was I to

be reminded continually that, after all, no matter how far I might advance into the charmed circle, I was, in fact, an "impostor"? Was the truth always to be kept before my mind, plaguing me, that despite my correct appareling, my — for the time being — liberally filled pocket-book, the indisputable fact that as good blood ran in my veins as any in America, and that I was probably possessed of more gray matter and was better educated than most of these scions of the false aristocracy of wealth around me, I did not "belong"?

My unpleasant thoughts were interrupted by a somewhat familiar voice beside me. I turned, and recognized one of a little group of society folk, a classmate and former glee club member at Harvard, Bob Goodwin, the son of a famous sugar trust magnate.

With him was a magnificently attired woman of middle age, obviously his mother, and two stunning and superbly gowned young women.

"Down for the tennis?" he asked, and, removing my spotless panama, I assented eagerly.

With a supercilious nod he moved away, leaving me without the thought of presenting me to the rest of his party apparently entering his head.

"There's a fine sample," I thought savagely to myself. "Bob Goodwin and I knew each other for four years at college, practically lived together for

days at a time on glee club trips, called one another by our first names, yet here, instead of introducing me to his party, he probably thinks that he has conferred a real favor upon me by recalling my last name and recognizing me at all. I'd like to kick the puppy, confound him."

But the sober second thought followed, "I had a whole lot better kick myself for expecting anything else. Why find fault with his attitude? He is simply behaving in a perfectly natural manner, the logical result of his bringing up, and is fully justified by his standards. Whether those standards are false or not is beside the point, but there are no two sides as to the falsity of my own position. I am a rank outsider, nothing more, and even if my well-laid plans mature, and I manage to worm my way into this society as I hope to, I will still remain in fact a fraud and an impostor — I, John Alden Shaw, who have ever raved inordinately against anything savoring of sham, deceit and hypocrisy."

I almost spoke aloud the thought, "I'll be damned if I'll do it," and without rime or reason, rushed away from that atmosphere of beauty, fashion, music and laughter, with my heart hot within me against it all.

The truth of the matter is, not until that moment had I regarded my mission really seriously or

in any other light than that of a semi-vacation, a lark, perhaps a romantic adventure. Now, for the first time, strangely enough, there rushed over me, like an engulfing wave, the realization of the utter falseness of my position, and how underhanded were the methods which I had to pursue to attain my end. In that moment it seemed to me that I was deliberately planning to become a very Judas. Had I not undertaken to hound out a young girl, who, hurt and frightened, had hidden herself from her pursuers, to win her friendship and trust by the rankest of deceptions, and then betray her for a price? The mental reaction plunged me into the depths of shame and disgust, and, once well started in this new direction, my mind swung, pendulum-like, to the other extreme, and as my thoughts grew by what they fed upon, I began to convince myself that Willard was all that I had thought he was not, and that his young and lovely bride was, in all probability, fully justified in the step which she had taken.

From this confession it may be gathered that beneath an outward assumption of professional calm, and an ordinary matter-of-fact appearance, there lay hidden a somewhat turbulent, over-sensitive spirit subject to absurd extremes, and a supernormal imagination — and, I must admit, that such was the case. The trivial, but — as they then seemed

to me — highly significant occurrences at the Casino, shattered like a bubble the mental exuberance which had been mine for the past two days, and left my mind a prey to morbid imaginings, wholly out of proportion to the facts.

With such thoughts running through my mind, I walked heedlessly down Bellevue Avenue, towards the cliffs as it chanced, and, in a brief time, my upset feelings began to respond in part to the mere physical exercise, and, in part, to the calm influence of the night.

It was an evening fit for the gods. The first cool breeze in some days was blowing softly in from the ocean, bringing with it a low hanging, phantom mist, above which the stars, viewed through the Florentine framework made by the dark interlacing branches overhead, twinkled with added brilliancy.

A practically continuous line of magnificent motor cars hummed and purred past, their powerful lights boring paths through the half mist, illuminating those ahead, and bringing into sharp relief the heads and shoulders of fair women from whose ears and necks, priceless jewels — or their counterfeit presentments — sent out a myriad of tiny flashes of living fire, or displaying the silk hat and black shoulders of a man whose worldly possessions staggered the imagination.

Newport was on evening parade, and the wholly

customary, and therefore unostentatious display of wealth and its outward and visible evidences, shed abroad a powerful, though perhaps insidious, influence, which in turn took possession of my mind.

All these sudden changes in my mental attitude may seem to indicate weakness or vacillation. Perhaps they do, but it must be remembered that I am here merely recording facts, and not in any way trying to create the majestic and iron-willed figure of a hero.

However, it is true that all these worldly pleasures and possessions soon began to seem most desirable once more, and I looked forward with eager anticipation to the time when I might hope to participate in them. My proposed method of effecting that desired end might not be wholly ideal, but, I shortly concluded, it was not, after all, so very reprehensible. It was a matter of pure business in which I was merely an agent. I was under orders. Moreover, if Mr. Willard's story were true (and I had before that night felt no reason whatsoever to doubt it in a single particular) the end fully justified any means which I might find necessary to employ in obtaining it.

Once reconciled as a result of my efforts, Mr. and Mrs. Willard would live happily ever after, like the two in the fairy tale, and upon my head would be showered their blessings.

As my thoughts arrived at this pleasing conclusion, the dazzling headlights of a big car, which was just swinging back into line after passing by its forecourser, swept from left to right across the front of a machine which was rapidly coming toward me. It was brightly illumined only momentarily, but I chanced to be looking squarely at it, and my heart stopped suddenly and then began to race exultantly, for this passing glance of the fiery eye had disclosed to me seated in the tonneau two young women.

The nearer one, who wore a filmy white veil just at that moment floating backward like a streamer in the breeze which the car created, was, beyond the shadow of a doubt, none other than the object of my quest — Mrs. Willard herself.

I could not be mistaken. That fleeting glance had left stamped upon the retina of my eye an image which matched in every respect the picture of his runaway bride which Mr. Willard had shown me, save that this face was a trifler thinner and paler perhaps, as well it might be, I thought, considering the real or even fancied trouble she had recently passed through.

The other girl may have been her sister, but the only impression I had received of her was a mass of brown hair, dark but indescribably flecked with shimmering gold, which was done in a girlish manner low against her neck.

The light passed by, and the car and its occupants vanished from my sight. The surprise which this wholly unexpected apparition produced, paralyzed my intellect for an instant, and when I recovered sufficiently to wheel about and attempt to catch the number of the car it had disappeared into the mist and darkness.

Glancing at my watch — the only really old and personal thing about me — I was startled to discover that it was nearly ten.

I had forgotten all about my appointment, and now I hastened back toward the city with swinging strides, my mind gloating over my discovery, and eager to play the game again. As the clock in the old City hall boomed out the hour, I was hurrying down Pelham Street through the sleepy and sleeping old town, such good time had I made. Below me I caught momentary glimpses of a fairyland beyond the low buildings which lined the waterfront, for the inky harbor was dancing with the reflections from many lights on men-of-war, and those floating palaces, the millionaires' yachts.

Breathless I entered the United States Hotel and looked around for the detective.

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH I MEET A FAMOUS DETECTIVE

My acquaintance did not include many detectives, but, somehow, in the back of my mind, I had the vague impression that a sleuth should be tall and spare, with a long drooping mustache, heavy eyebrows overhanging eyes as piercing as an eagle's, and tread as silent as a cat's.

I looked in vain for such a personage. The only man in the corridor was rather short and decidedly rotund, with a flushed and moonlike countenance and two very light blue eyes with wrinkles at the corners which told of a merry disposition.

Furthermore, he was exceedingly bald.

The clerk was not in evidence, so I approached the aforesaid stranger and asked doubtfully if he happened to know of a Mr. William Sherlock, whom, I understood, was stopping there.

"My name," he responded shortly. "Who are you?"

I introduced myself and proceeded to apologize for my tardiness. He acknowledged my humble words of regret with a disconcerting, "Huh."

This was scarcely a propitious opening, but I ascribed his mental state to the broiling heat, for the ocean breeze had not yet penetrated the sweltering lower city.

At last he suggested none too graciously that we go to his room to have our talk, and on the way thither he harangued me fluently upon the impropriety of a young man like me keeping a very busy one like him, waiting for half an hour.

By the time we were closeted in his chamber I had entirely changed my mind as to the cause of his flaming countenance. Mr. Sherlock, I was now convinced, had most certainly been solacing himself with the cup which both cheers and inebriates, and my lateness had apparently been the excuse for at least one more drink than he actually needed,—probably several more.

Never shall I forget the conference, if conference I can call it, which ensued.

My companion lowered his bulky form gingerly but impressively into the only chair in the bedroom, filling it thereby to overflowing, and I was obliged to find a seat on the single bed. He paused long enough to regain his breath and then began to talk, much as a train starts on a long journey, at first slowly and with many a jerk and puff, then faster and faster, gesticulating freely and impressively

meanwhile, holding a vile smelling cigar butt between two pudgy fingers.

Never have I listened to such sustained grandiloquence.

He commenced by anathematizing Newport in general, and Newport during a hot spell in particular, in sonorous rounded periods. Then he swung onto the subject of my tardiness once more, and from the impressively reiterated proposition that no man had any right to keep waiting, even for an instant, a detective whose time was as valuable as his, he passed naturally to a vivid elucidation of just why his time was so very precious.

There was no question but that, at this moment, Mr. Sherlock regarded himself as without a doubt the peer of all detectives, and, had I been able to believe all the exploits which he recounted in substantiation of his proposition, I must needs have agreed.

But, unlike the White Queen in "Through the Looking Glass," I could not believe the impossible.

As I sat hearkening to his steady flow of eloquence with secret amusement, I began to find my mind groping among a vague association of ideas for his counterpart. Suddenly I found the answer,— Eureka! My host was none other than the reincarnation of the famous Sir John Falstaff, and as he com-

menced another tale more thrilling than the last —"But that was nothing compared with the time," etc., my mind conjured up ten men in Lincoln green.

"What an absurd parody on a detective this man is," I thought, "and no wonder Mr. Willard had not been getting results." Yet I learned later that, sober, he was an extremely efficient and skillful sleuth, his appearance, so unlike what was to be expected, inuring greatly to his advantage.

I wish that space permitted me to recount some of the marvelous exploits in which he figured as hero, and I could have listened longer with much enjoyment, but the hour was growing late, and I finally took advantage of a momentary pause in the flow of his eloquence while he rang for a bell boy and ordered another drink — which he certainly did not need — to suggest humbly that he get down to business.

Mr. Sherlock drew himself up with injured dignity, and replied,

"This present matter, sir, is wholly unworthy of our consideration. I repeat, I reiterate, I say it again, wholly unworthy of consideration. The idea, the very idea of a man of my ability, my undeniable ability — (and he stared at me threateningly as though daring me to question it) — being set to perform the menial task of spying upon, in

fact, I might say, playing chaperon for a mere runaway bride. The very idea is an insult, sir, an insult. Now, if the young lady had left her husband for the purpose of eloping with another man, ah — (and what a world of meaning he crowded into that 'ah')— then the case would have been ver' different, and worthy of my efforts. Yes, had she eloped with another man it would have been ver' different."

At this I with difficulty suppressed a laugh and could not help feeling that if Mrs. Willard could have seen how badly he felt then, she would have been thoroughly ashamed and sorry that she had not provided a paramour in her escapade.

At this juncture the bottle arrived, and, when I refused his somewhat hesitating request to join him, my host seemed distinctly relieved.

"In fac', I might say, sir," he continued, "that this present is a H—ll of a job for a man of my caliber. I dunno what th'office was thinkin' of. Politics! Thas what it was,— politics. Some one, in fac' several, are jealous of my ability 'an' they pull strings to have me shent down to thish Godforshaken hole. I'm dishgraced, everlashingly dishgraced, thash what I am," and here he gazed at the bottle almost tearfully, seeking, and apparently finding, comfort in it.

"Dishgraced. Sent down to Godforshaken hole

to play chaperon for harmlesh, half-sick young lady. Lovely young lady, hup,"—a long pause,—"Gor'-blesher."

Taken with the close atmosphere in the little room, the last bottle had proven the straw which broke the camel's back, and I began to fear that my companion would pass into a state of complete maudlin intoxication before I had acquired the information which I sought.

"Why, she'sho innocen' she doeshen' even know she's being watshed, an' she would'n giva damn,—pardon th'expreshion"—(and he bowed apologetically as though the object of his remark were actually present, very nearly losing his balance and toppling out of his chair)—"if she did."

For a moment he straightened up and took a new grasp on his tongue. "Hard, interesting job for a man ushed to wrestlin' with the mos' in-in-intricate problemsh, hup, hangin' around thish God-forshaken placsh with nothin' to do an' not a shingle shoul to do it wi'. An'all on account of fool girl who doeshn know when she'shwell off. Shay what you may,—I deny no one the right to hish own opinion,—Mishter Willard'sh a perfec' shent'leman,—perfect shent'leman, an' rollin' in money, one of the rishes' men in worl'. John D'sh a pauper shide of Mishter Willar'—hup."

I thought it high time to interrupt, and so, as

tactfully as possible, expressed my sympathy over his sad situation, and added cheerfully, "Well, buck up, old man, your troubles are about over. All you've got to do is to tell me where Mrs. Willard is staying now and then pack up your grip and leave for the white lights of New York town. Where is she? Where is Mrs. Willard staying?" I repeated in an endeavor to drive my question home.

He looked at me vacantly a moment, then replied. "Dam-'fI-know."

"What did you say?"

"I shaid, 'Dam-'fI-know.' Thash what gets me."

"You don't know? Why, you just said—"

"I shaid nothin' of short, never sho mush as intimated shuch a thing, sir. Why, mi'swell look for a needle in a hayshtack as for tha' girl in N'port. Lef' Gilman'sh lashweek. Dishappeared into thin air." He looked vaguely up into nothing, then glared at me, adding, "There'sh no use tryin' to deny she lef' Gilman'sh. I had it shtraight from shecon' maid,— one of shecon' maidsh, should shay. Gilmans hav' hundred shecond maidsh. Thash foolish, can't be hundred shecon' maidsh. Only one shecon' maid, then thir', fourth, fifth, shixsh,"— I stirred nervously. Was he going to count maids up to the hundred?

But no, he here reverted to his original thought, saying, "Always shtand in wi' the shecon' maidsh an' kitchen mechanics, thash my motto, greatesh li'l helpers in the worl', Gor blesh 'em. Alwaysh make love to ash many ash possible. Why, would you believe me—(his voice sunk to a confiding whisper) fool shecon',—the big blond one,—achually believesh I'm goin' to marry her nex' week. Huh, marry her an' get 'reshted for bigamy? Not mush. But thasha dope. Make love to 'em an' they'll tell you all they know, an' more,—infinitely more."

"I'm very glad to know about your system," I replied, "and I'm sure that it works like a charm, but just now I'm a good deal more interested in locating Mrs. Willard. I understand that she had left the Gilmans as you say, but from your remarks about this task of yours being too easy for a man of your talents I assumed that you had located her again."

"Wholly unwarranted 'sumption, sir. An' ash for tas' being easy,—don' fool yoursel', my frien', don' fool yoursel'. Why, she'sh shlickes' li'l propo-shition I've run up against in week of Shundays."

He leaned forward confidentially and tapped my knee with his fat forefinger. "She'sh sho blame' shmart she eshcapesh me ever' time, an',"—very impressively,—"she doeshn't even know that I'm

followin' her. I've trailed her up hill an' down dale," he almost sobbed, "but still she eshcapes me."

There was absolutely no use attempting to argue with him in his condition, so I asked as patiently as possible, "But if you say that she has eluded you, and that you have been following her she must still be in Newport."

"Thash right, she mus' be in N'port ash you shay," he replied, as though I had made an illuminating discovery.

"When and where did you see her last?"

"Lash? Yes, thas right. Lash night. Out on Bellevue Avenue she was, ridin' wither shister in a shix cylinder car. Too dark to shee number or who was drivin'; mush too dark, mush!"

This statement took the sting out of my own like failure.

"Sheen her number of other timesh out shame place mornins ridin' like the devil on Cheshnut mare, an' she nev' shaw me at all. Mosh complete dishguish, wonderful, wonderful. Don't know where she came from, don' know where she went, rides like the devil, sir, faster than the devil, mush faster. Too fash to recognize number of mare,— or make. Fifty maresh jus like it in N'port, five hundred, fi' thoushand. Like huntin' for needle in hay stack, tryin' to fin' cheshnut mare in N'port. Can' be

done," and here his voice trailed off into a maudlin wail, "Oh, I'm helofa detective, can't fin' chestnut mare."

I thought so, too, and, thoroughly disgusted, got up and gave him a vigorous shake and fairly bawled at him, "What in thunder are you talking about? How can a half sick woman like Mrs. Willard be riding a chestnut horse like the devil around Newport?"

He gazed at me with a hurt, dreamy expression for a moment, waved his hand slowly but eloquently, and murmured, "Shister," and passed away.

Angry clean through, and determined to give him his release on the morrow, I left him as he was, snoring heartily, slammed the door and made my way downstairs and to my own abode.

Once back in my bedroom and soberly going over in my mind the confused events of the past few hours, I found my wrath cooling somewhat. I decided not to take any hasty action in regard to the detective. Obviously the fact that he was employed by a leading firm in such a delicate matter was pretty fair indication that he possessed real ability, and, after all, Newport was a big place, the Lee sisters were practically unknown except to the Gilmans and whoever was now harboring them, and certainly the former would not divulge their retreat

since they had fled to them for sanctuary. There were probably fewer clews to run down scientifically than would have been left by a real criminal, and the discovery of their refuge would come eventually, and almost any day, by chance. Two were twice as likely to run upon it as one.

While I undressed, my imagination conjured up at least twenty different ways in which I might meet the object of my quest, varying from a commonplace introduction by a mutual acquaintance, after I had learned with whom she was staying and had won my way into their particular set, through various stages of increasing absurdity until I pictured myself the hero of a dramatic rescue from certain death just as her chestnut horse in a wild runaway was to plunge over the cliffs.

So active was my brain that, when, well after midnight, I finally fell asleep the same theme was carried on in my dreams.

Now I was carrying off the prize to my employer in a big Packard car, madly pursued meanwhile by a huge chestnut mare with a face strangely like that of the detective. Then the two of us were escaping together in the automobile while Mr. Willard was following us on the same horse; and still again we had mysteriously changed places and I was mounted upon the flying steed — like young Lochinvar — bearing the unhappy bride before me in my arms,

closely pursued by the irate husband in the motor car.

I seemed to hear the clatter of our horse's hoofs on the pavement and see about me the bright radiance from the car's headlights. An irresistible desire to look around and see how close it was upon us seized possession of me. At last I yielded to that awful fascination. As I turned my head the piercing, dazzling ray flashed straight into my eyes, blinding me. I reeled in the saddle, my charge slipped from my arms. I saw her fall down, down, down into infinite space. With a scream of terror I awoke, the cold perspiration starting all over me.

The blinding morning sunlight was streaming full into my face, I lay half out of bed and my pillow was on the floor. From beneath my window came the rattle of an early milkman's cans.

Here, then, were my automobile lights, steed, eloping bride and thundering hoofs.

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH FATE SUPPLIES ME WITH A FRIEND

THE glorious dawning of my first day in Newport seemed to me to furnish a bright augury for the success of the mission which brought me there, and, despite the earliness of the hour, I jumped out of bed and dressed quickly, eager to start about its accomplishment.

Save the servants, no one was stirring in the house. I stopped for a moment in the writing-room to make out my entry for the coming tournament to be posted at the first mail box, and then going out into the invigorating morning, strode off down Bellevue Avenue taking deep breaths of the fresh clean air, for the atmosphere of a city, it has always seemed to me, is never really clean except in the very early morning hours, or when it has been thoroughly washed by a good rain.

With quick strides I followed my course of the previous evening, but with my thoughts as different from those dark ugly ones which had then afflicted me, as white is from black. Who could be moody or distrait on such a morning? It was not

a day in June, but it was a rare one, and whether I looked or listened I could "hear earth murmur or see it glisten."

On my way down the Avenue I had provided myself with a temporary check against the pangs of starvation, in the shape of a little fruit purchased at one of those attractive shops, but by the time I had passed the polo field and was almost out to Rough Point my internal anatomy was sending out preliminary warnings that it was past my usual breakfast hour.

I was just on the point of regretfully turning back when I heard the sound of a galloping horse behind me, and, looking around, beheld a big chestnut horse thundering down the avenue, expertly ridden by what I at first thought was a boy. But no, it was a young woman clad in a close-fitting and becoming riding habit, breeches and black leather puttees. From her head floated, banner-like, a gauzy white veil.

I needed no second glance, and no detective to tell me that here was the object of my search again,— or, at least, her sister, as the sleuth's final remark had suggested — but the flying steed carried its rider by me so fast that I could not satisfy myself on that question.

The pair swung around the right angle turn into Ocean Avenue and disappeared from sight, and, al-

though I broke into a sprint, when I reached the turn there was nothing in sight except a lonesome cab jogging its way toward its daily stand by Touro Park.

I now knew as much of the elusive Miss Lee as the detective could tell me, and my curiosity to know more was mounting momentarily.

Three hours later found me at the Casino again, greeting that king of groundsmen, "Tom" Petit, and other acquaintances of former years among his younger assistants, and in their company treading the perfect surface of the championship court with words of appreciation and praise for its condition, and wondering if I should ever tread it in a contest. What a marvelous combination of nature's aid and man's art the greensward of a perfect tennis court is, after all, smooth and even as a billiard table and as green, soft and resilient as velvet above but firm as a rock beneath, its geometric pattern laid out in snow white lines. What an ideal setting for this greatest of games.

As we walked back to the locker building I had a brief opportunity to speak a word in private to Mr. Petit, whom I had known not only at Newport but in the Tennis and Racquet Club in Boston where he ruled supreme during the winter months I confided to him that I had run across a gold mine and would not be adverse to adding, this vacation,

to the tennis a little more social diversion than in the past, and named over several men, all shareholders in the Casino and who played their tennis there, to whom a kind friend had given me letters of introduction.

I had laid my plans well, for he was the one man who knew everybody, and he gained my everlasting gratitude by promising, in his hearty way, that he would see to it that I met them and had my "day in court."

We had just reached the veranda and were standing looking over the row of "second best" courts toward the orchestra pavilion when I heard a voice behind me saying, "Hello, John Alden Shaw, down for tennis week?"

I almost jumped, so startled was I by the similarity of the question to that which, the night before, had started my train of ugly thoughts. Turning quickly, I looked into the eyes and saw the outstretched hand of a fellow tennis team-mate at Harvard, Dick Witherbee, a prince of good fellows and idolized son of a Newport millionaire.

There was no mistaking the real heartiness of his greeting however, as he clapped me on the shoulder, and he immediately proceeded to present me to his two companions who had just emerged from the indoor court where the youthful world's champion had been practicing.

"John, shake hands with Will Hammond and Ned Manners, both members of this club. Girls, meet John Alden Shaw, of Bosting, the man who made Hen Longfellow famous. You should know that John, here, had the honor of being a class-mate of mine at dear old Harvard, where he was famous for being the worst tennis player who ever got a place on the team, and thereby hangs a tale." He ran on gayly while we shook hands, "It happened like this. Jack Swift — you know Jack? — was captain of the tennis team and leader of the glee club as well, our sophomore year. This John tried for a place on both the same day, and the ordeal of seeing and listening to him perform twice within a few short hours was too much for Jack. That evening, to steady his horribly shaken nerves he took a little something, then another, and in fact several other somethings. About midnight he blew into my room and confided to me with great sobs that as a tennis player John Alden Shaw was the very best little singer he had ever seen, and vice versa. The long and short of it was that the idea became so firmly fixed in his mind that he straightway seized a sheet of glee club paper and wrote Shaw that he had made the tennis team, and notified him that he had been retained for further trial in the glee club, on some tennis team stationery."

A good-natured laugh at my expense followed this

absurd tale, and the atmosphere of good-fellowship which was immediately established emboldened me to say to Mr. Hammond, whom I recognized as a leader in Newport's sport loving set, "Dick's reference to my ability as a tennis player has dealt a mortal blow to my pride, but since I used to play number two and he number four on the team you can imagine how good *he* was, and, by the way, Mr. Hammond, George Wing, whom you know, and with whom I have played frequently at Longwood, was kind enough to give me this note to you, when he heard that I was coming down for the tournament," and I handed him one of the letters which I had in my pocket in readiness for just such an emergency.

My heart was warmed by his quick and gratifying response of, "That's fine, Shaw. You may count on me to furnish you with the keys of the city if you are all George has said about you. Now, I've got an idea —"

"Good heavens, how did that happen?" interrupted Manners, jocosely but half sneering.

"Why don't you make your headquarters at my shack while you're here? My better half's away and I'm keeping bachelor hall, and I tell you, it's lonesome business. That's the very thing, and I won't take no for an answer, so don't try to protest. Where are you hanging out? Meunchinger-

King? All right, I'll send my man there for your duds this afternoon."

My faint protestations were swept aside like chaff by his breezy insistence, and, before I knew it, I had assented, and thus, less than twenty-four hours after my arrival in Newport, I saw the brazen gates swing open for me. Truly the good augury of the morning was being speedily fulfilled, and the Fates were smiling upon my mission.

"Now isn't that just like Will Hammond," broke in Dick in real or feigned disgust. "Next to Teddy Roosevelt he's the darndest man for butting in and running things to suit himself that the world has ever seen. Why, they say that he is positively afraid to go to church lest an irresistible impulse force him to mount the pulpit and preach the sermon. If he ever did that, I bet I know just what his text would be, and it's the only quotation from the Good Book that I know, too—'Take a little wine for thy stomach's sake and for thine often infirmities.' That's your motto, isn't it, Ned?" he added, addressing Mr. Manners, and I judged from the flushed, 'though handsome countenance, and puffy eyes of the third member of our group, that he somewhat frequently indulged in that ancient remedy.

Without expecting or waiting for a reply, Dick rambled on merrily, "I wanted John myself, but I

suppose there's no use trying to buck up against the irrepressible Hammond. Why, when he's at a wedding he wants to be the bride, and the corpse at a funeral."

"Oh, cut it, Witherbee," broke in Manners again, wearily. "That chestnut has been told about Roosevelt so many years that it's old enough to vote." Something in his way of speaking and the tone of his voice caused me to take an instant subconscious dislike to him, as I had been instantly attracted to Mr. Hammond.

Dick, however, proved to be irrepressible and taking no notice of Manners, continued, "How's the old arm, John, hitting 'em any this year?"

I was about to commit myself when Mr. Hammond said, "Don't bother to answer. I've got another idea, and two in one day is a record. Come up to the office, till I put you up here at the Casino as my guest until the tournament starts, when you'll have the privileges anyway, then I will send you down to the Meunchinger-King and you can get into your tennis flannels and we'll try you out in a set of doubles. Seeing's believing, you know."

This proposition met with my approval, although I felt it incumbent upon me to make the stereotyped remark, "But you mustn't expect too much of me to-day. I've had little chance to practice this summer, and none at all on grass to date."

"That's what they all say," replied Manners, who, apparently, had a thoroughgoing grouch on this morning.

Mr. Hammond executed as well as he planned; the morning was passed according to schedule, and two o'clock found us seated on the veranda restaurant at Guntha's looking down upon the scene of our recent defeat, for Dick and Manners had taken three straight sets from my partner and me — which was scarcely a cause for wonder considering the fact that I was out of practice, and Mr. Hammond played merely for fun and exercise and was correspondingly erratic, whereas Manners a few years previous, had been ranked among the magic "first ten" players and might perhaps have been numbered there still had he been willing to train faithfully. As it was, each year's rating found him well up on the list.

As I might have expected, my partner proved to be a good loser, and I trust that I gave a similar impression. Furthermore, he insisted upon assuming my proportion of the cost of the luncheon which was the stake for our little sporting match.

Former years had made me sufficiently familiar with Newport customs not to be surprised when Dick ordered highballs for four as soon as we had reached the locker building after our game, but as I was not accustomed to drinking at mid-day I

passed when cocktails — several of them — were called for at luncheon.

Not so the others however and, as always, the drink brought out more sharply the natures of the three. Mr. Hammond became more and more mellow and friendly, Dick ever more hilarious and silly, and Manners glummer and more sarcastic.

"Name your sustenance," said Mr. Hammond, and, after due consideration of the menu, we selected ragout of lamb, grilled bones and rabbit stew.

"Waiter," called Dick in clarion tones, and when that dignitary approached, beckoned confidentially to him to lean down, and then shouted in his ear,

"You may bring us 'a rag, and a bone and a hank of hair.'"

"I beg you pardon, sir," was the bewildered response.

"What for? You haven't spilled anything yet," and so, throughout the meal Dick's persiflage ran on like Tennyson's "Brook" until I, at least, the only abstemious member of the party, was thoroughly tired of his inane nonsense.

We took our time over the repast, and I had an excellent opportunity for studying the characters of my three table companions as we ate and smoked.

Dick I knew of old, and I found him little changed — the same irresponsible, light-hearted boy of ten years before — but the other two represented

types new to me as far as intimate acquaintance went.

Both were good-looking, well-groomed men of the world, well along in the thirties, polished in manner, highly educated,— at least along the lines of the typical American of wealth and assured social position,— as alike as two peas as far as externals went.

But the resemblance ceased with that.

My host-to-be was beaming with good nature and kindliness, in every sense a good sport. With Manners there was a subtle difference. It would be absurd to say that he was a typical villain in the play muttering " curses " at every other line, but he gave the impression of having a cold, calculating nature and an inherent tendency to sarcasm. Indeed the more I saw of him the less I liked him, and I could not force myself to make any advances in spite of the fact that discretion told me that I ought to do everything in my power to strengthen this chance acquaintance into at least an outward form of friendship (if there can be any such thing), for who could tell but that he might be the one man who held the key to the position I was planning to storm?

Some people cause an instinctive dislike in others just as cats or snakes do. Manners affected me in this manner, and it was all that I could do not to be

positively rude to him despite the dictates of wisdom, and he made no effort to be courteous.

During the course of our desultory conversation I tried several times to introduce casual remarks which might lead it around to the subject which was uppermost in my mind — the whereabouts of the Lee girls — but my bait caught no fish, and I came to the conclusion that my present companions were not acquainted with them.

Still, I could not but feel that the morning had meant a long step forward in the accomplishment of my scheme, and I experienced a deep satisfaction over the way things were going.

At last the meal was ended and our simple repast together with the tip, spoiled a twenty-dollar bill.

As we rose to depart I noticed that the sky had become suddenly overcast, and, during our ride to my new domicile, it began to sprinkle gently.

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH I MAKE AN INTERESTING DISCOVERY

It may rain as hard in other cities of the East as it does at times in Newport, but I doubt it.

A few years ago, at least, it seemed as though J. Pluvius invariably selected the month of August, with its tennis and horse show weeks, for his annual visit to this famous summer resort, and, despite his unpopularity, stayed with all the usual persistence of the unwelcome guest.

It happened that the gentle shower proved to be the advance guard of the army of General Humidity and Major Storm, and for three full days the rains descended and the floods came, the only periods of intermission in the steady downpour being filled with unendurable sultry mists.

The streets glistened like mirrors, under the lashing of wind and rain the trees shed their leaves, and within the Casino grounds, whither I, with others, made daily journeys, the paths were turned into brooklets and the turf courts into a morass.

Many times during this period of enforced idle-

ness I should verily have passed away from ennui had I been cooped up alone in the Meunchinger-King, and I thanked my lucky stars which had sent me to Mr. Hammond's. Not only was mine host a prince of entertainers, an excellent pianist and skillful billiard player, but his residence had a well-stocked library and the time passed pleasantly, although toward the end I began to grow restive and as eager as a hound in the leash to take up the trail.

My new abiding place was situated to the right of Bellevue Avenue (as one faces the cliffs), on a cross street running out toward the golf course, and overlooking one of the two ponds. It was an artistic, rambling, low, silvery-shingled mansion like a glorified bungalow, with stables, garage and tennis court spreading over a considerable stretch of land.

A quarter of a mile nearer the Avenue was the Manner house and somewhat further in the other direction, on a little rise, stood a handsome colonial mansion set well back from the street, which was here scarcely more than a dignified country road. This, I learned, belonged to the Aldriches, a family of great wealth, but of the older school of New York aristocrats, therefore quiet and seldom mixing with the ultra smart set.

On the morning of the third day of my stay with Mr. Hammond he received a telephone invitation from Manners to dine that evening at the lat-

ter's house informally, and the suggestion,— begrudgingly made, I imagined,— that he bring me along. At first I suggested to my host that he go without me, but he seemed so much in earnest in insisting upon my accompanying him, saying that it was merely a stag affair with perhaps cards after dinner and that I would have a splendid opportunity of meeting some of the other neighbors, that I yielded.

Thus Fate gave the wheel another turn, and at seven that evening — the fifth day of my stay in Newport — I was seated at table with a dozen of the most wealthy business and society men of New York and Newport, and the first step in my scheme had been accomplished as easily as though I had been possessed of the magic wishing ring.

To the others of that gathered assembly the meal which followed may, indeed, have seemed plain and informal, but not to me.

From cocktails to café noir and cigars it was a perfectly appointed and elaborate dinner, served by a stately English butler and two assistants, who bore out the general scheme of things in the Manners' residence — the family consisted of Manners and his mother, still a leader in society, who was not present — which was inside and out magnificent, but too modern and showy to suit my New England tastes. Hammond's more homelike and comfort-

able abode, with its trim maids, fell in with my fancies far better.

All that savored of informality during the meal, as far as I could see, was the fact that instead of wine, highballs were served, the guests all voting in favor of them, and the further fact that the stories were many of them hardly fit for mixed company, as it seemed to me, and some of them, indeed, highly salacious. After one particularly suggestive tale, I remarked to Mr. Hammond in an undertone that it was just as well that it was a stag affair and he promptly called over to the raconteur, "Our young Puritan here, thinks that that last joke of yours had better be taken out in the back yard and buried, and blushes to think how he would feel if there were ladies present."

A general laugh followed, during which I blushed in fact. As it subsided, the man addressed, a fatherly and rather ministerial appearing gentleman, replied good-humoredly, "Then for the sake of his Sir Galahadean ideals I'm glad too, for that very story was told at the Bermans' dinner Saturday night by Mrs. Becker-Tolman."

Verily the society in which I had shone — according to Mr. Thomas — was not like this, and in my mind the present one did not gain any by the comparison.

Dinner finished, we adjourned to the library, and,

for a little while, I wandered about, feeling much like a fish out of water, for those generals of finance could not, it seemed, go through a whole evening without "talking shop," and I must admit that much of their conversation was Greek to me, all of whose stocks and bonds consisted of a few isolated shares of corporations which I had assisted in organizing, given to make me eligible to be dummy president for a day or two, and whose most important investments were covered by a small subscription to my home coöperative bank.

I drifted naturally to the library table, and began to glance casually at the books strewn about it, popular best sellers most of them, and, thinking that a man's taste in literature is, after all, a pretty accurate indicator of his character, was just about to turn away again when my eyes fell upon one volume, lying open back up, and partly hidden by a newspaper. Without thinking particularly I read the title, "The Lee Family of Virginia," and my attention was instantly riveted.

It is strange how even the smallest incidents loom large when they chime in with and receive a special significance from something which is filling all one's thoughts.

Covertly glancing about and seeing that no one, especially the owner of the house, was paying any attention to me, I turned the volume over. It was

opened to a chapter and page descriptive of the homestead and possessions of Colonel William Kent Lee, of Fairdale, and now my interest was vitally gripped indeed, for this same Colonel Lee was none other than the late father of Margaret and Marion, and Fairdale was their home country-seat. I read a few words which had to do with the more recent additions to their famous estate, and then turning to the front of the book, made mental note of the name of the firm of publishers, for possible future reference. As I replaced it I saw that it had been resting upon an atlas, and that from between the pages of this protruded a little marker slip. My curiosity was now sufficiently aroused to cause me to open this to the place indicated, and, as I had more than half anticipated, the plate at that page showed a map of this same Fairdale County. Moreover, it bore certain outlines in red ink, whose meaning, however, was an enigma to me.

Just at this stage in my investigations the various small groups split up as though by the result of telepathic suggestion, and our host bade us find places at the three card tables which had been set up by the gliding attendants.

Fate sent me to one of them with two new acquaintances, and the others being quickly filled with the full quota our table held the only empty seat. None too well pleased, it seemed, Manners took pos-

session of this, and, while the cards were being shuffled the silent-footed servitors made the rounds again, leaving at each table four tall glasses, a decanter, a syphon of charged water and ash trays.

All these arrangements, and the business-like way in which several of the guests threw aside their dinner jackets, told their own story. I was in for an evening of it, and I cut for deal with considerable inward trepidation. I was only a fair card player, and my mind recalled tales which I had heard at the Casino of the exalted stakes these men sometimes played for.

My fears received justification a moment later for Manners remarked in an off hand manner, but with a side glance at me which I read as a challenge, "Usual stakes?"

"Uh, huh," grunted my partner, a captain of industry daytimes, now busily engaged in masticating the end of an unlighted dollar cigar, "Dollar a point."

My mind did a quick sum in mental arithmetic. A little streak of bad luck and we might easily drop a thousand points, and any schoolboy knows that a thousand times one dollar is a thousand dollars, which represented nearly all my worldly goods.

Manners broke in upon my train of thoughts, saying, with thinly veiled sarcasm, "Perhaps that's a little out of Shaw's line. Half a cent might seem

more natural — that is, if his tender conscience permits him to gamble at all." As a matter of fact he had hit on the truth in both particulars for I next to never played for money, and, under usual conditions, half a cent a point would have looked large. But his manner affected me as a red rag does a bull, and, moreover, I recalled Mr. Willard's parting injunction about the necessity of spending freely in order to win my way into the society where I expected to find the truant bride. The opening wedge had already been driven in, but I must not allow it to become blunted now, I thought.

With as much nonchalance as I could muster I replied, "Suits me. But, with your permission, I am going to ask to be allowed to quit at midnight, in case you have not finished before that. You see, I'm supposed to be in strict training for the 'all-comers' next week, and fond papa didn't send me down here to sit up into the small wee hours playing cards by way of preparation,"— which was strictly true, he had not. It was a rather feeble attempt to restrict my possible losses but the best I could think of on the moment.

"Oh, that's all right," broke in my vis-à-vis. "Want to knock off early myself to-night, for I'm dog tired. Had to go to the city this morning, and slave like a coal heaver in the awful heat putting through a little two for a cent deal. We idle rich

are such lucky cusses, you know. By the way, Manners," he added as he dealt, "how's that deal of yours for the Virginia woodland progressing?"

I pricked up my ears with interest.

"Rotten," was the frank reply. "The corporation got control of one of the prettiest bits of hardwood land south of the Mason and Dixon line practically for a song and then ran plumb up against a snag. It's like this." He took out a silver pencil and hastily sketched a rough map on an ace of diamonds. One glance told me that it corresponded with the one of Fairdale County in the atlas. "Here's our present holdings. This little strip almost cuts it in two, you see, and separates the west section from this stream. It's almost absolutely essential to us in order to cut and get the stuff out with facility. Old Colonel Lee evidently smelt a rat and bought it up to protect his property, just before he died three years ago. Their house is just about here, right on the edge of it, you see. The whole shooting match went, on his death, to his only son and we had him on the run and just about to fall for our proposition, when he had the damn bad taste to drink himself to death. Now, it's all off again, for the two girls who own it won't listen to selling it, 'No, sah, not a single foot of our fam'ly possessions, sah.' Damn these sentimental females, with their highfaluting, Southern ideas of family honor and

such trash. We're ready to pay 'em a big figure, but, unfortunately, they've got money to burn themselves, and a little more's no object to them."

His tale of woe was greeted with gibes and laughter, for a successful man of business always enjoys seeing another caught, especially by one of the weaker sex, but their merriment goaded him into bursting out, "Oh, well, we're not done yet. We've had a shyster lawyer or two on the ground for several weeks and they've got an idea that there's some sort of a flaw in the title to this very strip, and are chasing up the heirs of the grantor now. If they're right, we'll buy the whole outfit for a plugged nickel and the girls can whistle for their 'fam'ly possessions, sah.'"

"So you think you have the ladies on the hip, eh? Shame on you, Shylock," laughed my partner.

"Why, you know who they are, at least by reputation, Knowlton, one of them married your friend," — this spoken in sarcasm —"Roland Willard, of Boston, a while ago, and I'll bet a house and lot that he's behind the whole thing." Manners stopped suddenly. He had drunk heavily before and during dinner, his tongue had become loosened and he had blurted out this whole story with never a thought, apparently, that there was a stranger, and a Bostonian at that, present. Now, quite naturally, the

sudden superimposed, so, with a sigh of regret, I brought hand down, saying, "Gentlemen, the fatal shot a gl struck for me, and, in accordance with my terrogatinse, I must get me gone to my little white my facial
dently appelle," said my partner, "you are not go- for he lookeight in the middle of a hand."
ject to a safed I went on in a half jesting tone.

A momente if I didn't keep faith with myself, played auction, hate to pin medals on my own per- at the table wa: show what a really wonderful will All of them had ot the best hand yet."
and now frequentl ce," laughed Manners disagree- their elbows as they pressing the others: "Trust a abstemious and comp to take advantage of a tech- and only this fact enabwell to stop when you're as I have said, I was mor haw knows that that last to be compared with any o1"
skill. ars, and my temper

But, unfortunately, as time went clear and cool became more enthralling and the room which some- hotter — no breeze having sprung up thinking and to dispel the torrid humidity — I, too, uncon critical began to have somewhat frequent recourse Mr. highball glass beside me — constantly replenished a watchful servant — in which the ice tinkled invit ingly. How easy and natural it is to pick up a cooling glass almost without thinking, and take a

such trash. We're ready to pay 'em a bomething but, unfortunately, they've got money themselves, and a little more's no cers in the them." le was be-

His tale of woe was greeted with ıe in name laughter, for a successful man of busi vas given or enjoys seeing another caught, especiall ı once when the weaker sex, but their merriment nd me three into bursting out, "Oh, well, we're We've had a shyster lawyer or two our hands were for several weeks and they've gl irted with each there's some sort of a flaw in the kept almost even strip, and are chasing up the h tten my earlier re- now. If they're right, we'll bu it until, like poor a plugged nickel and the girl olling out the hour set 'fam'ly possessions, sah.'"

"So you think you h e certain in my own mind eh? Shame on you, S I played in the melodrama

"Why, you kno that of a hero or, like Dogberry tation, Knowlt About Nothing," I should be writ- — this spoli ass.

Boston, a d had just been dealt out, and I had com- he's be sorting it with the thrill that comes to a card deni upon viewing an unusual hand, namely eight perfect clubs; queen and two other spades, king and queen of diamonds, and—no hearts, when midnight struck. An appeal to my own trusted timepiece helped not at all. Its hands were also perpendicu-

lar and superimposed, so, with a sigh of regret, I laid the hand down, saying, "Gentlemen, the fatal hour has struck for me, and, in accordance with my self-promise, I must get me gone to my little white bed."

"Oh, piffle," said my partner, "you are not going to quit right in the middle of a hand."

"Yes," and I went on in a half jesting tone. "I'd lose caste if I didn't keep faith with myself, and although I hate to pin medals on my own person, I'll say, to show what a really wonderful will I have, that I've got the best hand yet."

"Huh, fine chance," laughed Manners disagreeably and added, addressing the others: "Trust a lawyer to know when to take advantage of a technicality. It's always well to stop when you're ahead, and, of course, Shaw knows that that last rubber put him in the lead."

I could scarcely believe my ears, and my temper flared up, while my brain became as clear and cool as crystal with the abnormal calmness which sometimes comes to a man who has been drinking and suddenly finds himself face to face with a critical situation. "Pardon me for contradicting, Mr. Manners," I answered, "but, as a matter of fact, I was under the impression that you were ahead. You have been keeping score. I haven't."

"What the devil? Do you mean to insinuate,

sir, that your first proposition was dependent on the second?" my host shot back.

"Not at all. I merely stated two independent and uncorrelated facts, both of which are perfectly true, whether you care to believe it or not. Furthermore, Mr. Manners, you made an insinuation a minute ago that I didn't like the sound of, even as a joke, as I presume it was meant. I refer to the fact that when I said I was holding the best hand I'd had this evening, you replied 'fat chance' or 'fine chance,' or something like that. It didn't sound good to me, and, if you think that I was bluffing and are still inclined to doubt my statement, I'll change my mind, postpone my departure just long enough to play this hand out and give you a chance to satisfy yourself on both points, or show me up. In plain English it's up to you to make good your assertions or retract them, Mr. Manners."

CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH I MAKE AN ENEMY

Now all this was, of course, very youthful, very melodramatic.

Yet human nature is much the same in all ages and the world over. Men have quarreled over silly games, called hard names, passed the lie like children, and are we not, after all, but children of an older growth? If it had been out West and poker we had been playing, and, instead of mild highballs, we had been drinking our whisky straight, by this time one or the other of us, or both, would have been punctured with bullet holes.

In a lower strata of society we would now be rolling over the floor pummeling each other energetically. Being in Newport, and gentlemen, we merely glared at each other and spoke cutting, sarcastic sentences, which was highly civilized, but worse, in a way, than either of the other methods mentioned. The saying " Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me," which we used to chant as children, is far from the truth. It is perfectly possible for men to express their primeval

passions by pounding one another and afterwards be the best of friends, but repressed dislike which finds its only expression in bitter words strikes inward, and often engenders a more lasting hatred than any physical licking.

In our heat we had both raised our voices unconsciously, and now the players from the other tables gathered about us with questions, and, scenting some real sport, began joyfully to egg us on.

I had believed that Manners was wavering and was on the point of complying with my request that he retract his insinuations, but the presence and baiting of the others overcame his better judgment, and, taking another hasty glance at his own cards and without deigning to answer my remark in words, he said, "All right, we will play it out. It's your bid, Gramm."

"No bid," responded his partner, regarding his hand disgustedly.

"Hold on a minute," broke in Mr. Hammond, who had come and taken his stand behind me. "You two are a little excited and pretty sure to overbid your hands in consequence. There's no sense pulling your partners into it. I suggest that they settle on the basis of the present score."

"Great little head, Hammond," promptly answered my partner. "Let Manners and Shaw bid

"IN OUR HEAT WE HAD BOTH RAISED OUR VOICES UNCONSCIOUSLY"

their blocks off if they want to. I'm the provider for a large and hungry family —"

"Alas, poor man struggling to make both ends meet on an income of a paltry half million a year, and support in penury one blond wife and two blond babies," interpolated Hammond.

"Yes," said Gramm, "but think of the terrible cost of keeping that wife a blond twelve months in the year." But the object of these gibes continued unmoved, "— and I don't intend to be offered up a sacrificial lamb on the altar of the Gods of Chance because of the whim of these mad gamesters."

"Righto, I agree," said Gramm, "you owe me to date the magnificent sum of twenty-seven dollars, the receipt whereof I will be pleased to acknowledge with thanks."

Mr. Hammond picked up the score and after looking it through, said, "You're games all. Are you going to count the rubber also if either of you scores another on this hand?"

"Just as Mr. Manners desires," I replied, determined to go the limit now.

My patron gave my shoulder an approving squeeze, and bending over whispered in my ear, "That's the way, boy. I'm your banker if you lose and get in over your head."

I nodded my thanks, and Manners now thor-

oughly aroused, replied, "Let's go the limit by all means; I guess that I can stand it if he can."

I thought so, too, when I remembered with a sickening sinking in the pit of my stomach that my bank account stood at little more than the thousand dollars, with which Willard had supplied me, and which was to all intents and purposes a trust fund.

"Well, it's your bid; Gramm passed," said Manners testily.

Discretion told me to bid on my wonderful club suit, but I threw it to the winds, and, taking a gambler's chance on the hearts, replied,

"Without trumps."

"Two royals," said he, being seated at my left. My partner passed, as did Gramm, and the battle was obviously between us two.

"Two without."

"Three royals."

"Three without."

He ran over his cards again nervously, then said, "Double it."

"Re-double." Those who were behind him whistled. Manners led the ace of spades. My partner's hand was laid down and proved to be negligible and Manners smiled, but I was not yet worried, for, my queen being twice guarded, his spade suit was blocked, as he realized when he led the king and the queen did not fall. Had he known

my lack of hearts he could easily have won, since he held both red aces, but his natural play was to lead another spade in order to force the queen and establish his suit, holding his aces for re-entry. This he proceeded to do. Taking the trick with my queen, I quietly played out my eight winning clubs, leaving him to take the last two tricks with his two aces.

"Whew, some hand and some bidding!" said Hammond, in an exultant tone. "Let's see," and he began to figure out loud, "Three odd, thirty, doubled and redoubled, one-twenty; fulfilling contract one hundred more, that's two-twenty. Less thirty for Manners' honors, one-ninety. Add two-fifty for rubber, four-forty. Add twenty-seven on old score. Four sixty-seven iron men total damages."

"Might have known as much," replied Manners in deep disgust. "Betting on a sure thing."

"Not in the least. You could have made four royals even if I hadn't gone up to four without, as I probably should, and been set. And, as for your knowing as much, I certainly told you times enough that I had a splendid hand. As far as I can see, you have no one to blame but yourself."

"Well, I call it pretty small potatoes, considering the stakes we were playing for. You had the winning tricks right in your own hand."

Now thoroughly exasperated as much by his man-

ner as his words, and aroused by the liquor — for I must have drunk more than I had realized — I answered hotly, "It seems to me, Mr. Manners, that if either of us can be accused of being a poor sport I am not the one who has laid himself open to that charge. Didn't I warn you at the start that I had an unusual hand and didn't intend to play it? Your attitude forced me to do so against my will. Now I'm going to make you one other proposition to settle once and for all whether there is anything in your insinuations, or not. You owe me four hundred and sixty-seven dollars, I believe it is. I'll cut with you to see whether you pay me double or nothing, low card winning."

This suggestion met with a hilarious welcome from the rest, who assailed my opponent with all manner of taunts, and there was nothing for him to do but accept or be marked down a quitter.

Taking the Hobson's choice he shoved the pack over to me and I turned up a knave. Biting his lips he cut,— a trey, and I arose as calmly as I could, saying "We're quits."

Manners immediately became jubilant, and as Mr. Hammond drew me toward the door he said in unmistakable disgust and without attempting to lower his voice, "Hang it all, I was praying all I knew how that you might win that, Shaw. Why, I'd have been willing to pay the damages myself to see

that tightwad get stuck a thousand dollars. He's fairly reeking with money, and all he'll ever spend — except on himself — is the evening."

Dismissing the motor which had called for us, we walked home through the tropical midnight air, Mr. Hammond meanwhile commenting freely and forcibly on our late host and his methods in business and otherwise. One of his apropos remarks led me to mention what I had heard him say earlier in the evening in regard to the Virginia land deal. My companion swore, remarked that it was thoroughly characteristic of his methods, and, a moment later, to my astonishment, began to laugh heartily.

"Let me in on the joke, if it's that good," said I, and as he answered, stopped short with a surprise which drove every other matter completely out of my head, for I heard him saying, "It just struck me that perhaps friend Manners wouldn't have been so free in discussing his plans as to the Lees if he knew that Miss Lee herself — the unmarried one — was within half a mile of him at this moment, and all of his guests likely to meet and become friendly with her almost any time. If he got up a little earlier in the morning he would have found it out for himself, for she has been riding right underneath his nose before breakfast every day for a week past, and ride! — say, she's a regu-

lar centaur — you had ought to see her, and she's a little peach, too."

As well as I could I controlled my voice, but, even so, my answer, "I *should* like to see her," was astonishingly hearty.

"Oh, you will in time, I guess; in fact we might run up to the Aldriches and call some day. I've been intending to wait until my better half got back, but, if you like, I'll sacrifice myself and go as your chaperon."

"The Aldriches?"

"Yes, she's visiting there — the big colonial house up the pike, you know. Why, if Manners gets wind of it I'll bet a spring bonnet that he's got just nerve enough to gain an introduction and lay siege to her heart, hand — and land."

"Not if I know it," I thought to myself, and Mr. Hammond must have regarded me as peculiarly inattentive the rest of the way, for I heard scarcely another word that he said, so full was my mind of this latest and wholly unexpected disclosure, and the manner in which fate was furnishing the solution to all of my problems, one by one. It had begun to seem positively uncanny.

With the usual unreasonable conceit of youth I gloated over the knowledge that I had run the quarry to earth — or her sister at least, and I felt confident that where one was, there should I find

the other also — utterly overlooking the plain truth that I had personally done not a single thing to achieve the result, but had merely been the favored child of fortune. I hummed in high spirits as I undressed, feeling that my mission was already as good as accomplished, my exultant mind scorning the idea of any obstacles which I could not surmount with ease. When I was ready for bed, I found that all inclination for sleep had vanished, and, having thrown a light bath robe over my pajamas, I picked up a book which I was in the middle of, wholly forgetful of my earlier remarks about being in training and wanting to retire early. But neither could I concentrate my mind on the story, despite its being a most entertaining one. The excitement and thronging impressions left in my mind by the occurrences of the evening were too strong, and, laying the book aside, lighting a cigarette and leaning back with my hands clasped behind my head, I let my thoughts run over the various incidents again and again.

In time the discovery of Mrs. Willard's retreat ceased to present itself as the most important of the evening's events, and the facts which I had learned by chance about Manners' operations and plans, to assume first place in my thoughts. I became convinced that it was very much up to me to make use of the information which I had acquired,

and, moreover, to act upon it quickly, if I were to accomplish anything.

The more I thought over the situation the more clearly it appeared that I owed it as a corollary to my duty to Mr. Willard to protect his wife's interests, if possible, even though I was not employed for that purpose. And I also began to feel a chivalric desire, like Robin Hood, to prevent injustice being done by the stronger to the weaker — especially since that weaker was a woman.

Getting paper and fountain pen I proceeded to write out for my employer a concise account of what I had learned at the Manners', and added the name of the publisher of the volume in which he could find the name of the grantor whose defective deed might yet be the cause of so much trouble for the Lee family.

This done, a sudden mad impulse seized me. I would accomplish the whole thing single-handed. The thought that I might not possess the ability to do so never entered my head. After the briefest moment's hesitation I tore up the letter, and getting a clean sheet of paper wrote as follows to a friend and classmate at the law school, Jack Borroughs, whose home was in Petersburg — a fact that had been recalled to my mind a few weeks previous by the receipt from him of an announcement that he had opened his own office in that city.

"Dear Jack:

"Upon receipt of this epistle you are to call off everything that you may be doing else, and immediately devote the whole of your time and gray matter to the accomplishment of what may prove to be a difficult and delicate task, on my behalf. I feel sure that if you cannot do this, or chance to be retained already by conflicting interests you will let me know at once, and consider this letter as strictly confidential and not to be taken advantage of in any way. You see what a compliment I am paying you in suggesting that even a lawyer can be so honest.

"I am attorney for a Mr. Roland Willard of Boston, whose name may be familiar to you for he recently married one of the belles from your vicinity, Miss Margaret Lee of Fairdale. I am now in Newport for him on another matter, and only to-night learned, by the merest chance, that a certain New York corporation (whose name I unfortunately do not know), which is controlled by a Mr. Edward Manners, the big financier, has acquired a large tract of hardwood land somewhere in your neighborhood.

"He believes that it is essential to gain possession of a strip owned by the Lee family, which apparently cuts their holdings almost in two.

"The Lee homestead is situated right at the edge of it, and they refuse to sell.

"It further seems that this iniquitous corporation (all corporations are that, we attorneys know), has had a lawyer on the spot for some time, and he (I hope that *he* is not you) has or thinks he has, discovered a flaw in the title to that particular strip of land.

If the Lee girls persist in their refusal to sell, the company plans to subsidize the heirs of the grantor — I presume that he is dead — and get them to void the title, if possible, on behalf of the corporation.

"Here's where you come in, D. V. It is up to you to find out who that grantor was, look up the deed and if you find that they are right about it, and that it is defective, turn Sherlock Holmes, run to earth the heirs and get from them a confirmatory deed before they fall for any proposition which the company may make.

"This is sort of a leap in the dark, and my information is very meager, but if the facts are as I have learned them it's worth one of the biggest fees you ever received to get that deed for us and slap it on record P. D. Q.

"I assume that you can trace the title through your grantee's indexes in the registry, but if you have any difficulty you can find more than I have been able to tell you about the strip and its grantor in a volume called 'The Lees of Virginia,' at page 211.

"Good luck to both of us.

"Sincerely your friend,

"JOHN ALDEN SHAW."

Strange, is it not, how the merely associating with men of big affairs and almost unlimited means — and a few highballs — can affect one?

Here was I, John Alden Shaw, to all intents and purposes, penniless and little more than the slaving junior member of a law office, one who had always considered long and carefully before spend-

ing a ten-dollar bill, pledging myself for the payment of a big counsel fee without any authority, and giving instructions on my own initiative in a matter in which tens of thousands might perhaps be involved.

The letter written and deposited in the mail receptacle I tumbled into bed and slept the sleep of the just.

CHAPTER IX

IN WHICH I BECOME A HERO

When I awoke the following morning the thrice-welcome sun — since unseen for three days — was well up in the heavens.

I bounded out of bed and looked at my watch. Nine-thirty!

My temples felt somewhat constricted, but an invigorating cold plunge, and a few deep breaths at the open window dispelled this quickly, and in twenty minutes, shaved and clothed in my right mind, I was tiptoeing past Mr. Hammond's door from behind which gentle snores informed me that my host was still in the land of Nod.

Exercising the freedom of the house — a privilege freely extended to me by Mr. Hammond — I ordered my solitary breakfast, and then started out for a brisk walk alone.

The air, clear and cool after the three days' rain, was like ambrosia to the taste, and the countryside, now washed and smiling after its bath, looked like the Elysium fields. I was clad in a faultless and spotless flannel outing suit and wore a becom-

ing panama, and the feeling of satisfaction which my fine raiment produced, the bright sunshine and the high hopes which I held for a speedy meeting with Miss Lee — or rather Mrs. Willard — all combined to make me revel in the mere fact of living.

Two of Mr. Hammond's dogs, a stately Newfoundland and a frisky Scottish terrier, had joined forces with me for the ramble, and their characteristic antics showed that they responded as I did, to the glorious morning.

Together we alternately raced and walked down the road in the direction of the Aldrich mansion, for I had it in mind to let no time elapse before giving my patron saint the opportunity for working another miracle on my behalf, to wit, presenting the object of my mission to me, and I had no doubt but that this desired result would shortly be accomplished.

As we approached a rustic wooden bridge which spanned the brook, I noticed a pretty little tot of four or five summers playing on it, while her nurse sat, deeply engrossed in a book, under a tree by the roadside. The child was balancing herself over the lower of the rails dropping pebbles into the stream, and as we drew near her, the terrier rushed forward barking furiously after the nature of the beast, but only intent on play. The little maiden misread his intentions, however, screamed in terror,

lost her balance and pitched headlong over the rail and into the water.

Simultaneously came another shrill scream from her attendant and a shout from me and we both dashed madly for the spot. A dozen leaps carried me to the bridge, and, without pausing to think, I dove dramatically headfirst over the railing.

An instant later I was standing up, the struggling, sobbing miss in my arms, both of us covered from top to toe with thick, slimy mud — with the water not up to my waist.

As I shook the liquid mud from my eyes, the first thing which they lit upon was the lithe, boyish figure of a young woman racing at full speed down the lawn from the Aldriches'— in short, none other than my rider of the chestnut mare, Miss Lee.

My chagrin may better be imagined than described. Here, forsooth, was a brave meeting, a fine climax to my deed of valor.

Completely downcast, and swearing inwardly, I waded dejectedly ashore, the mud sloshing ludicrously at each footstep, and surrendered my burden into the outstretched arms of the vision, who began to cuddle and comfort the frightened youngster, utterly oblivious of the fact that her own immaculately snowy lawn dress was speedily being reduced into dank and muddy bedraggledness. After a moment, during which I stood uncertainly,

she passed the child over to her nurse, whose apron straightway suffered the fate of the vision's dress, and held out both her hands to me, saying, "How can I thank you, sir? It was the quickest and bravest thing I ever saw."

"Brave!" I ejaculated in deep disgust, wholly forgetful of my manners. "Do you call *this* brave?" Simultaneously we looked down at my mud encrusted form — and burst into a shout of laughter.

As soon as we could catch our breath after a moment of hysterical giggling, like school-girls, she replied earnestly, "Yes, of course I do. You couldn't know that the brook was only a mud hole, and it is the spirit that counts. Besides, three feet of water was enough for little Janet to drown in," and she again extended her hand.

"Thank you. Your words take at least the worst sting out of my present ignominy, Miss Lee." Her name slipped out unconsciously, and I would have given a good deal to have recalled it, for I felt her start, and she instantly withdrew her hand from my muddy but close clasp.

"How did you know my name?" she asked quickly, and in some agitation.

Realizing that I had put my foot in it, but decided to carry my slip through as well as I could, I continued breezily, "I didn't."

"Then how . . . why . . .?"

"I spoke it absolutely unconsciously," I replied truthfully, "and I suppose my mind struck upon it by a process of subconscious reasoning. You see, I had been told that a Miss Lee was staying with the Aldriches — I am a guest of your neighbor, Mr. Hammond. Moreover, I recall having seen a newspaper picture of that Miss Lee from Virginia who recently married Roland Willard, and having read that she had a younger sister who was almost the image of her — as you indeed are of that photograph. *Voilà,* there you are. Isn't it simple?"

"I thought Sherlock Holmes was dead," she answered, smiling again, a bewitching smile so natural and infectious that it captivated me at once.

"His methods live, you see."

"I suppose I ought to say 'marvelous.'"

"Of course. And now, since you admit the identity, may I introduce myself as John Alden Shaw, of Boston, attorney at law, at your service, so we start even again." With this I, in turn, extended my hand, and after just the barest moment of hesitation, she took it with another peal of laughter.

We were so engrossed that we had not noticed a motor car come up behind me as we stood in this striking but ludicrous posture. A young man sprang out of it onto the bridge, exclaiming, "Well,

for the love of Mike!" Then, as he caught sight of my mud-streaked face, he sat down suddenly on the auto step, placed his hands to his sides and went off into a roar of laughter, shouting, "John Alden Shaw, by all that's good and holy! I suppose you've read that we Newport profligates sometime indulge in a swim fully dressed for novelty, but I assure you that we don't consider it *au fait* to do it at ten o'clock in the morning, nor choose a mudhole like this in which to disport ourselves. What are you doing in Newport, anyway — except taking mud baths?"

"You needn't laugh, Bert Aldrich," broke in Miss Lee with some energy. "It isn't any laughing matter. If it hadn't been for Mr. Shaw's presence, and his promptness and bravery, your niece might be dead this minute. I can imagine *you* diving headfirst into a brook to save any one, without thinking it over for an hour, during which she would have had time to drown a dozen times."

This sarcastic and somewhat illogical remark had an immediate sobering effect upon the newcomer. He demanded, and was given, full explanations, and then also joined the ancient and honorable order of the Muddy Hand, by seizing and shaking mine vigorously.

Could anything have been more opportune? Surely Fate was working overtime in my behalf, for

it happened that Bert Aldrich was the third — and last — of the New York-Newporters whom I had known at Harvard. And I had known him well, too, as we were members of the same society, and, once more, my heart sent up a little silent hymn of thanksgiving and exultation over this further piece of luck, for was not the object of my quest actually domiciled at his home?

"Miss Lee has exaggerated, of course. Anybody would have done what I did, and most would have had sense enough to wade in and make the rescue without the dramatics. But, you bet that I'm mighty glad to have been Johnny on the spot, Bert. As a matter of fact though, my dog — or rather Hammond's — was the cause of little Janet's being in the brook at all, so I was to blame for the accident in the first place."

When I said "Miss Lee" I saw Bert glance inquiringly at the other, and she, reading his look aright, replied, "Yes, you see we have already introduced ourselves to one another."

"Well, under these rather exceptional circumstances I don't see how I can enter any objections, even though I am your chaperon and responsible for your friends in Newport. Anyway, certainly neither of you would ever recognize the other again in conventional attire."

We laughingly denied the allegation.

And certainly I was not likely ever to forget the picture Miss Lee made, her bewitchingly lovely face rising above her mud and water soaked dress like a beautiful water lily from out the river mire.

When a woman can look so charmingly sweet and attractive under such circumstances, I thought, she must indeed be blessed with rare loveliness, and as I covertly studied her beautiful face still childlike in its contour, crowned by a mass of wonderfully soft hair, brown but indescribably streaked and flecked with burnished gold, coiled close against her neck, her large expressive eyes, similarly colored and shaded, and her graceful slender form, its girlish curves accentuated by the moist clinging gown, I knew, on the instant, that in her I had found my very ideal of womanly beauty.

My thought was interrupted by Bert's hearty voice, "Come on, pile into the machine and I'll take you up to the house for a bath and change; I guess you can wear my duds."

But I refused with thanks, saying, "There's no need of that, old man, for it's only a few minutes' run down the street to my own abode, and nobody is likely to see me on the way. You take Miss Lee right along before she catches cold, for she is pretty moist, I'm afraid. If I may though, I'll run over this afternoon to inquire whether or not little Janet

has suffered any ill effect from her unexpected bath."

"Sure. After this morning's episode our house and all therein is yours. Eh, 'sister'?" Miss Lee blushed rosily, but whether at the familiar pet name or the insinuation, I could not say.

She seemed about to reply, then hesitated, so Bert continued,

"Silence gives assent, so you may consider yourself unanimously elected, only I warn you that when my real sister, Ethel, hears of this deed of valor and sees you coming, even a long way off, like old father Prodigal, she will run and fall on your neck, for saving her child. Incidentally, don't consider it a call, but come early, bring your tennis bat — if you are still playing at the game — and stay to dinner, there'll be no one there but the family —" here he, too, stopped as though struck by a sudden hitherto unconsidered thought, but after an almost inperceptible pause continued, "and all of them will be ready to start 'Hail the Conquering Hero Comes' on the phonograph at your approach."

The meaning of these two pauses was evident enough to me, but far from being deterred by the presence of the recluse, I accepted the invitation in its entity all the more eagerly, and after a final hand clasp, left them and started off down the road on the run.

I had confidently prophesied that I would meet no one. Foolish forecast. Hardly had I covered half the distance when I saw a group of riders approaching on the gallop. In the lead were Will Manners and Robert Goodwin, and closely following them the two young women whom I had seen in the latter's company that evening at the Casino.

At my astonishing appearance they all drew rein suddenly, and Manners greeted me in cold polite tones, "Good morning, Mr. Shaw. Gathering ammunition this morning?"

I removed my sadly dilapidated head covering, but before I could answer they rode on, laughing among themselves.

"Now what in the devil did he mean by *that*," I thought, as I started off at full speed again. "'Gathering more ammunition?' The only thing I had been gathering so far as I could see, was mud."

The meaning of his remark flashed through my mind. Manners was subtly accusing me of being a mud slinger, was he? I stopped, turned around angrily and shook my fist at the fast disappearing backs.

More laughter at my expense, good-natured this time, awaited me when I attempted to sneak into the Hammond domicile, but when I had reluctantly recounted the story of my morning's adventure my

host clapped me on the shoulder, with, "Bully for you again, old man! But I warn you that if you continue to become the hero of daily adventures like this and the one last night, the young unmarried Newporters will soon be riding you out of town on a nice sharp rail. Two of last evening's little gathering have already called me up this morning to gloat over your tilt with Manners, and I lose my guess if the whole story, with embellishments, isn't in next week's 'Town Topics.'"

I laughed somewhat uncertainly, and becoming serious, he added,

"But a word to the wise should be sufficient. Don't let this morning's romantic introduction lead you into any indiscretions, my lad."

Really puzzled I said, "I don't quite get your meaning."

"Oh, perhaps my remark hasn't any. I was just throwing out a hint at random, but your somewhat vivid description of Miss Lee led me to think that perhaps you were a bit smitten at first sight, that's all."

Again I laughed uneasily for I knew that his chance shot had scored a touch. He went on, "You mustn't forget that your heroine is somewhat of an heiress and a great belle at home and it would be hardly wise to get serious. Don't think that I mean you might not make an ideal husband in every

respect," he added hastily, "but you will pardon my saying that, although you have not said it in so many words, I have gained the impression that you yourself are not rolling in wealth, despite your indications of unbounded means last evening."

I flushed with chagrin over the thought that my deception had been so easily pierced, a fact which might speak badly for my further success in that rôle, but my mind was eased somewhat when he said, "Of course I may be wrong, and it's none of my business anyway. If I have guessed right it is from certain little things which you have let slip in our many confidential talks together the past few days, for let me say that you certainly play the part of a Crœsus to the manner born."

There was nothing to be gained by further deception so I admitted the truth of his surmise frankly, adding, "I suppose you think me a fool, but it was a holiday whim, not likely to injure any one."

"Certainly no one but yourself at the most," he corrected. "And personally I've been tickled to death at getting hold of you. I see so much of the petered out nonentities which constitute most of our present younger generation to-day — hopeless bores, all of them — that it's positively refreshing to run across a man like you with some fresh originality and brains."

I made a mocking curtsy of thanks.

"I'm in earnest. I believe that you represent an earnest, energetic type that is conspicuous by its absence in the younger scions of wealth. There are striking exceptions of course, fellows coming along who have all their father's brains and ability, like your friend Bert Aldrich, for example, a fine virile young chap in whose hands can be entrusted without any misgivings the great wealth which will some day be his. But most of the present crowd make me sick. Bob Goodwin is a fair sample, a society snob of no value whatsoever to the world, and even the genial Dick Witherbee hasn't a serious thought in his head and probably never will have.

"I like you, John. I'll be glad to help you play your little game and be damned sorry to see you go back to you ten per — or whatever may be your princely remuneration."

I thanked him again, with some embarrassment but filled with gratitude for his appreciative words, and before he left me he added one more sentence in line with what he had said previously.

"I am perfectly honest in the expression of my regard for you personally and as a type, but just the same there was some meat in my remark a minute ago. This business of the worthy but poor young man falling in love with the rich and beautiful heiress is very romantic and charming — in books. But, unfortunately, ninety-nine times out of a hun-

dred it doesn't work out that way in this old world of sin and tribulation. No man with any stuff in him can be happy when dependent on his wife's charity. Have a good time, make hay while the sun shines, but wear a good strong shirt of mail against Mr. Cupid's darts, is the advice of an old and very wise man. And now enough of moralizing. Get cleaned up and we'll have an early lunch. So long."

Good sound advice, truly. I knew it, and firmly resolved to remember and be guided by it. But, as Bobby Burns so aptly said, "The best laid schemes o' mice and men gang aft agley."

CHAPTER X

IN WHICH I SCALE A CITADEL

INSISTING that I make my triumphal entry at the Aldriches in fitting style, Mr. Hammond sent me over, after luncheon, in his car, and as we rolled up the long curving driveway, the thought came to me that the Lee girls could not well have selected a better place of retreat from spying eyes, nor one more likely to be pleasing to the taste of Southerners, for the house was an exact reproduction of an old time Virginia mansion of perfect type.

It was of red brick, vine covered, low, but spacious and having the inevitable broad verandas and tall stately white pillars. Nor were the grounds affected with any of the stiff formality so frequently seen about the Newport "cottages." The gardens were strictly of the old-fashioned variety, and the lawns, although perfect, somewhat limited. They gave on both sides into broad fields unmarred by the conventionalizing handiwork of man. At some distance on the slope, which ran down to the little stream, was a lazy flock of snow-white sheep contentedly grazing.

Drowsy peacefulness and contentment characterized the very atmosphere of the place, and from the cupola atop the house to the rambling outbuildings behind it, the picture was so typically Southern, that I fully looked to see a colored butler open the door at my ring — and I was not disappointed.

As he stood there bowing, an animated little bundle of outstanding flounces and petticoats rushed underneath his arm and flung herself into mine. I don't know how little Janet recognized me, but she did, and she, at least, was living up to Bert's prophecy on behalf of the family. Her mother, Mrs. Gary, was close behind her, and although she did not follow suit exactly, the warmth of her greeting instantly made me feel that I was to find in her a true and everlasting friend, and so it was to prove.

We had not conversed over a minute before we discovered that we really were old acquaintances, for I had met and danced with her at Harvard, both at the Junior Prom and on Class Day, and admitted to having fallen violently in love with her for nearly twenty-four hours on each occasion. And indeed she was a most lovable soul, rather petite and plump, and overflowing with good spirits.

While we were still in animated conversation recalling old times, Bert put in his appearance, and after demonstrating some surprise over the rapidity with which our acquaintance had ripened into in-

timacy, and threatening to telegraph at once for his brother-in-law, led me away to a summer-house to meet his mother and father. My walk thither was somewhat impeded because of the fact that little Janet insisted upon clinging to one of my legs.

As I had heard, now I found Mr. and Mrs. Aldrich to be a quiet, retiring and happy couple of more than middle age, who, indeed, seemed to resemble a country clergyman and his spouse more than the ordinary conception of master and mistress of a fortune counted in eight figures to the left of the decimal point.

The former was very tall, angular and wore the mutton chop whiskers of a period thirty years previous with a complacence unshaken by Bert's frequent irreverent remark that, "a hare lip is a misfortune, a club foot a deformity, but side whiskers are a man's own fault." The latter was very short, very plump, very rosy and had a quick lively birdlike way of moving and talking which I found extremely fascinating. Both were the very soul of hospitality, and their welcome, too, was so hearty and unaffected that it brought a mist before my eyes and I straightway felt that Bert's promise that I would be received into the family circle as a bona fide member thereof, was no idle words.

Inside of half an hour, spent in general talk, I felt as though I ought to be calling them Aunt Mary

and Uncle something — I had not heard his given name, for his better half always addressed him as "Mr. Aldrich," which made me feel more like a relation than ever, for I had never heard my maternal grandmother call her husband anything but "Mr. Alden."

I was really sorry when Bert appeared again to carry me off to his room, there to change into tennis regalia, and on the way he jollied me well over the impression that I had created.

As soon as we were closeted together, however, he dropped his bantering tone and said very seriously, "John, old man, I've got to tell you something which I know you will regard as strictly confidential."

I surmised, in a general way, what was in the wind, and, of course, assented.

"We all want you to feel and make yourself very much at home in this house while you are in Newport, and, in fact, if you feel like deserting Hammond and making your headquarters here I should be delighted. Even if it were not for our good friendship at Harvard, this morning's event would be aplenty to give you the 'open sesame' here, you may be sure."

I thanked him, but said I hardly thought I would take advantage of the second half of his invitation, adding, however, that I most certainly would use,

and perhaps abuse, the privilege granted in the first part thereof.

"Do that," he added, "but unless you learn without delay about the decidedly unusual and peculiar condition which obtains in our household at present and govern yourself accordingly, your presence might cause much embarrassment to one of our guests. You might innocently but inadvertently let slip a chance remark which would upset the whole kettle of fish, so it seems to be up to me to tip you off to existing conditions.

"I should not take the trouble to do this, but instead would take a chance that you wouldn't think anything peculiar in the fact that there is not one, but two Miss Lees staying with us, if it were not that I've heard that you already know all about the recent marriage of one of them to your Boston Willard, and had by a peculiar and perhaps unfortunate coincidence recognized 'sister' this morning from her likeness to a newspaper picture of the bride."

When he spoke of "*two* Miss Lees" I could scarcely suppress a start, for this seemed to indicate a still further complication.

I had, of course, expected him to say that Mrs. Willard was the other guest to whom he had been referring. But he misconstrued my look of evident surprise, and continued, "I don't wonder that you

seem astonished. As a matter of fact, the situation is a decidedly peculiar and mixed up one, and our staid old-fashioned family is, as a consequence, just now involved in about as queer a family tangle as you could imagine.

"But it is up to you to get any surprise that you may experience over the Arabian Night's tale I'm going to tell you, out of your system while you're up here with me. You know that my purpose in telling it is so that hereafter you won't indicate by word or look, either that you're acquainted with the circumstances or find anything out of the way in the situation. That's the way we're all acting by mutual assent, in order to save Mrs. Willard from further pain which would come if we constantly reminded her of her trouble. Instead we're trying to take her mind off it all the time. Get the idea?"

Here was a pretty state of affairs from my standpoint, if I were to be pledged never to speak to Mrs. Willard about her husband, and my mind was in a turmoil. I managed to say, "Yes, I think so, but—"

"Wait 'til you hear the tale I am about to unfold," broke in Bert. "It is in brief, this. Mrs. Willard was married a few weeks ago, as you know, but as you don't know, she left her husband on the afternoon of their wedding day, and now she is

planning to divorce him. I haven't been told her reasons in detail, but I do know that they absolutely justify her in her own mind, and that's enough for me.

"At first she was so hurt and broken up over her trouble and disgrace, that she was nearly insane and her one and only thought was to run away and hide somewhere. She couldn't face the thought of any publicity just then, and after she had conferred with her attorneys about a divorce she wrote them to hold their horses for a while. Moreover, Willard has, either from a sense of decency, or fear of a scandal, himself maintained a complete secrecy about the whole affair and his own presence in America,— you see the two of them are supposed to be off for a honeymoon cruise in the Mediterranean. It's a darned funny thing that in this age of pernicious newspaper activity, especially about the family affairs of people who happen to be at all in the limelight, that this hasn't leaked out somewhere; but it hasn't, and, so far, not a word has appeared in print about it.

"Willard hasn't been sulking in his tent, 'though, and has tried a dozen ways of getting his wife to change her mind and return to the family fireside, but nothing doing. Her first red-hot anger has cooled off, but her present calm, and what almost seems like contented, determination never to see the

villain again, makes any reconciliation very improbable.

"Both she and her sister are staying here for a while claiming sanctuary from mother, who was a Virginian, too, and their mother's most intimate girl friend. Their coming to our house was the result of another peculiar trick of fortune, too.

"Mrs. Willard's first idea on leaving her husband was, of course, to get to her sister. She had come here to Newport, directly after the marriage, with the Gilmans, at whose New York place the wedding took place, and when she — Mrs. Willard I mean — arrived that night, almost a wreck, she didn't have much trouble in persuading them to harbor her until she was in a condition to start for home. They had planned to go in a couple of days, but the very morning set for their departure fate butted in again and Marion came down with an accute attack of appendicitis."

"Great Scott," I interrupted, "that was sort of piling Pelion on Ossis, wasn't it?"

"It was. And, furthermore, just about that time Willard managed to locate his truant bride somehow or other — sleuths I suppose — and, in her nervous condition, she couldn't bring herself to face him or even thresh the matter out with his attorneys. She felt that she simply had to run away and hide again,

and what more natural than that they should come to us until they were able to travel, or she got her nerve enough to have it out with her husband. Between you and me, I think that she has now about decided to have the scrap out and done with before going back to Virginia.

"Now, you know the whole story — or at least as much of it as I do — and just why we happen to be harboring a maiden in distress, or a runaway bride, according to how you look at it. Moreover, partly to help conceal her identity from prying eyes or ears — in case Willard's agents are still on the job, you know — partly to make her feel more natural and comfortable, we all at her own suggestion and request call her Miss Lee, and treat her as we always have.

"The girls have always been almost like members of this family. We've known each other ever since we were babies, and I've been stuck on them both, off and on, since I was old enough to have a cub love, but, alas! they were not for me.

"As a matter of fact, I think it's true that no one except our family, the Gilmans and now you, even guess that we are harboring Mrs. Willard, for the servants have only heard us call and speak of her as 'Miss Lee,' although the last few days she has been going out somewhat, and apparently is coming not to care whether her refuge is discovered or not.

But say, old man, did you ever hear a queerer yarn even in romantic fiction?"

During this somewhat lengthy recital I had refrained from interrupting except for my one interpolation, but had been smoking and thinking furiously.

Here was I on the horns of a dilemma indeed. If, as policy dictated, I continued to conceal my connection with the matter, I would be rankly abusing Bert's confidence and friendship. On the other hand, if I disclosed my true purpose in Newport, he, as her ardent supporter, would almost certainly feel it up to him to warn Mrs. Willard of my presence and real character — upon learning which she would undoubtedly leave their home at once — or at least put me on my honor not to take any advantage of the hospitality which had been so freely extended to me by his family. Any one of these alternatives would make my mission fail *ipso facto*.

So completely was I immersed in this mental tangle and seeking vainly for the way out, that when Bert finished his story and asked his question, I utterly forgot to reply but, instead, walked to the window and stood there whistling softly.

My peculiar behavior dumbfounded him, and at last he burst out with some impatience, "Well, for Heaven's sake, John, what's the matter with you, anyway? Aren't you ever going to speak? Here

I've been spending my time, brain and breath in telling you what is supposed to be a most remarkable tale, and you walk off whistling as unconcernedly as though I'd remarked that it was a lovely day. You are a queer one."

Suddenly making up my mind, I wheeled about, and replied, "I beg your pardon, old fellow, but your story completely floored me, under the circumstances."

"What circumstances?" he interrupted, but I continued, "It *is* a peculiar story and situation, of course, but I'm going to tell you a tale, to my mind one step more remarkable, and, if you will, I want you to hear me through without comment. I won't attempt to pledge you to secrecy or even to regard it as a confidence — that would hardly be fair under present conditions — but, when I get through, I want you to do some tall thinking and tell me frankly just where I am to stand and what the next act in this problem play is to be, for it's apparently up to you."

"To me? I don't follow you at all, John."

"I don't wonder, but, as a matter of fact, your story, except for some minor details, was no news to me," and thereupon I proceeded to begin at the beginning and tell him fully all I had heard about this peculiar case, and my own connection with it, nothing extenuating. I did, to be sure, set out as

forcefully as I possibly could Mr. Willard's version of the starting point for the whole unhappy affair, and tried to make it clear that in undertaking my mission I had believed, and still did believe absolutely, in his honor and veracity. Incidentally, too, I painted in glowing colors the deserted husband's great distress and grief, and his indubitable love and repentance.

When I had concluded, it was Bert's turn to whistle, and his astonishment over my disclosures and the peculiar twists of fate which had brought the circles of my life and Mrs. Willard's tangent at his home, was adequately expressed by the simple sentence, "Well, I'll be damned!"

After a moment's silence he said, "Your problem is altogether too big for my feeble intellect to hope to solve, John. I admit it, and you've gone and put me in a mighty embarrassing position as well. I'm between the devil and the deep sea, and you may guess which is which. I owe a duty to Mrs. Willard as a refugee with whom I sympathize heartily, but now having had your confidence so unreservedly, I owe a similar one to you. Frankly, I don't know where I stand.

"I'll admit that your errand is in itself harmless enough, and, looked at from your point of view, beneficent. Just the same, I'm not keen about the methods you are using in accomplishing your result,

although I understand well enough that they seem to be the only ones left. You understand that I wouldn't speak of this if you hadn't done so yourself."

He paused, deep in perplexed thought, hands in his pockets and long legs stretched out. There was nothing I could say further to help him. Finally he rose with an energy which bespoke a decision and said, "I'll tell you what I purpose to do, if I have your permission. I'm going to tell your whole story to Mother and Ethel. Honestly, I want to shirk the responsibility of making a decision unaided in a matter upon which so much depends, and between you and me and the lamp post, my guess is that they will say, 'Go ahead.' Although they both love her dearly, neither has sworn unchanging allegiance to her cause as I have, for both mother and sister still cling to the old-fashioned ideas about divorce, and a woman's duty to her lord and master, and both have tried, and tried vainly, time and again, to get her to change her attitude.

"But believe me, if I were not sure that in whatever you may do you will be nothing but a gentleman and play the game on the level, I wouldn't give you even this chance, John. Do you agree?"

"Of course I do — I don't mean to your remarks about the 'gentleman'— for I'm beginning to have

serious doubts on that point lately — but to your proposal," I answered.

"As a matter of fact when I met Miss Lee this morning under such unusual circumstances, it seemed to me that fate was verily opening the way to the speedy accomplishment of my mission. Such an introduction, I thought, would certainly make it easy for me to gain the friendship of Mrs. Willard — or Miss Lee as you want me to call her — and even after I knew to all intents and purposes, that it was at your house she was staying, it didn't occur to me to change my plan of campaign in the slightest, or take you into my confidence. You see, I am laying all my cards on the table.

"I may even add that the enquiry after little Janet was in the main merely an excuse to get in here and meet Mrs. Willard — so, you see, there's not much of the saint about me after all. Of course, your confidences made necessary a change in my plans. It goes without saying, Bert, that I hope and pray that your guess as to what your mother's and sister's attitude toward my mission is likely to be, is an accurate one."

It seemed to me that during this confession Bert was regarding me with a peculiar expression on his countenance. When I had finished he started to speak, hesitated, then said, "Well, if my assumption is right, don't forget that from now on my position

is one of strict neutrality. Your confidences have tied my hands, too. I can't remain an active ally of Mrs. Willard now, but neither can I wish you luck, knowing the way she feels and sympathizing with her."

"That's understood. All I want is a fair field and no favor," I replied heartily.

"If the mater says the word, you'll get it. But there's another thing I want to throw out a friendly warning about. *Cave feminam!* You'll be playing with fire, don't forget that. Both the girls are beautiful, fascinating — and Southerners. Don't let any siren voices lure you from the straight and narrow."

I attempted to make a light answer, but it didn't ring true, and he added, "Of course, there is no need of warning you against the converse. You're not the kind of a chap to trifle with a girl's affections for the purpose of making capital out of the trust you win. To be concrete, I know that you would not make love to Miss to gain a hold on Mrs. There's my golden opportunity this minute," and, without waiting for me to answer, he indicated the summer house where Ethel was just joining her mother, and started for the door, calling back over his shoulder, "You stay here and finish your elaborate toilet while I go and find out what the powers-that-be are to decree."

Out of the turmoil that had been left in my mind by his remarks and hasty departure, one sentence stood out boldly and insistently, "You're playing with fire."

This was the second warning of that same nature in one day. First Mr. Hammond, now Bert, had felt it incumbent upon themselves to warn me against the possibility of falling in love with Miss Lee. The advice was sound, no doubt, but why everybody should think that I needed it particularly was beyond my comprehension.

The more I puzzled over it the more wrought-up I became, and by the time Bert returned from his interview I had worked myself into serious mental agitation.

He closed the door and looked at me quizzically. The fate of my enterprise veritably hung in the balance. Had the Goddess of Fortune been smiling or frowning upon my task?

I was not left long in doubt, for Bert said, "You win, as I knew you would. Womanlike, both mother and Ethel went into raptures over your romantic mission and fell for it without a moment's hesitation, just as I expected. Mother was for doing everything possible to bring your enterprise to a climax in a hurry, but Ethel had sense enough to realize that if they were too officious in their aiding and abetting, they might gum up the whole thing.

But you can count on their moral support, for they are both crazy for a happy reunion, tears, forgivenesses, another honeymoon and all that sort of stuff."

"That's more luck than I deserve," I broke in. "It is. You can't get up an argument on that point," he responded frankly. "The plan they've cooked up to salve their own consciences for this partial breach of trust towards their refugee is something like this. Since you knew the whole story before coming here, they think that their consciences are clear, and they're guilty at the most only of a white sin of omission in not forthwith disclosing your real identity to Mrs. Willard. They are, however, going to tell her that since you are likely to be hanging around here for some time like one of the family, they have thought it wise to tell you something of the true situation and that you have promised to play the same game we are playing, overlook the fact that she is a curiosity, and forget that things aren't always what they seem."

I drew a deep breath of relief and thankfulness, immediately regarding myself once more as the chosen instrument of fate for the accomplishment of the task in undertaking. Verily, whom the Gods destroy they first make mad!

"Get a move on you, John," said my companion,

evidently glad to get the whole complicated matter off his mind. "It's after five now, and if you don't hurry I won't have time to beat you even one set before dinner."

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH THE SIEGE IS COMMENCED

"MARGARET, permit me to present, 'our hero,' John Alden Shaw, a class-mate of mine at Harvard. John, Miss Lee."

Commonplace words enough, but to me full of deep significance and great possibilities. While my lips were forming the stereotyped phrase, "I am indeed pleased to have this honor, Miss Lee," my mind was exulting, "My quest is ended, I have found her, Mrs. Willard is before me."

Mrs. Willard, as I still named her in my mind, although the others chose to speak of her as Miss Lee, extended her hand in friendly greeting, and murmured some words which I understood in a general way to be praise for my morning's exploit and pleasure upon meeting the rescuer, 'though I scarcely heard them, so intently were my thoughts bent upon this meeting fraught with such deep meaning for us both.

Bert and I had played our match, and just descended after dressing for dinner. To my inordinate joy my strokes had been going much better,

and I had fairly swamped my host on the court and I had gloated so over my victory that his disgust was ludicrous and he had refused to continue, although I was still eager for more.

During the afternoon neither of the sisters had been in evidence, to my keen disappointment, for, manlike, I would have enjoyed a witness to my prowess, but Ethel reported that Margaret was resting and her sister keeping to her room for the purpose of writing letters.

We had found the former seated in a reclining chair upon one of the broad verandas within the checkered shadows cast by a thick tracery of vines which interposed between her and the sunset glow, for the sun was just disappearing, making its triumphal departure in a magnificent flood of iridescent glory, the whole western sky being brilliantly aflame with color. Such a scene depicted by the brush of a mere mortal artist would have been characterized as absurd, impossible. The shimmering rose which predominated in the bold color scheme — an intermingling of that tint with purple, pale green, gold and streaks of angry red — cast its warm glow over heaven and earth alike, bathing the fields and trees in its refulgence and lending a lovely flush to the invalid's cheeks, in themselves as white as pure alabaster.

Her wonderful hair, coiled on top of her shapely

head like a crown, was the counterpart of Marion's, and her eyes the same indescribable brown and gold. At this moment they looked in contrast to her pale face, even more lustrous and larger than her sister's, and her mouth, 'though similar in shape, I thought more serious in its expression and lacking in that irresistible tendency to curve momentarily into the suggestion of a smile, which I in a short space of time, had learned to recognize as a marked characteristic of my champion at the mud hole.

Less impetuous and fun-loving, more serious and mature than Marion, I thought, as I studied her expression while we conversed, but aside from this and the imprint left upon her lovely countenance by her recent trouble and illness, as much like her as though the two had been stamped by the self-same dye, and certainly no older in appearance.

No wonder Willard had loved her madly. But how could any man abuse ever so slightly such a girl as this? It was inconceivable, or else he must indeed have been utterly irresponsible through drink.

Scarcely had I spoken a dozen words to Mrs. Willard, as I could not but continue to think of her still, when her sister appeared.

As I caught sight of her standing in the tall Venetian window which served as a door for the side veranda, in her turn suffused with the heavenly

light, my heart gave a mad leap, and straightway the impression of the other's beauty was banished from my mind. So the calm and lovely moon pales into insignificance when the dazzling sun appears.

Marion was now clad in a modest evening gown of filmy black without ornament or jewelry of any nature, the only bit of color about her being furnished by her hair and eyes, and the healthy glow of youth upon her cheeks. Her hair was again done low at the back of her neck in the girlish fashion which had proved so alluring to me before.

A flicker of a smile passed over her lips as she extended her hand, saying, "Can this conventionally clad creature be *my* Mr. Shaw?"

"I do not wonder that you doubt it," I replied. "When you last saw me I must have been a picture no artist could paint."

"Certainly one no artist would want to paint," broke in Bert.

"Whenever I hear the word HERO hereafter — for 'sister' here, still persisting in the absurd idea that you qualified for that honor this morning — my mind will conjure up the vision of a water-soaked, mud-beplastered individual with dank hair falling over his eyes, and a most sheepish expression on his slimy countenance," and he burst into a loud haw haw over his own mental picture, the rest of us joining him, save one whose eyes flashed angrily and

who said, "Bert Aldrich, you ought to be ashamed of yourself making fun of Mr. Shaw like that."

"Ashamed?" he replied, doubled with mirth. "Oh, Lord, I should say I am — but I'd rather be ashamed than stop laughing. You see, the fact is, that all this laughter is merely a mask to hide my real feelings. In my wrought-up condition if I didn't laugh I should certainly burst into tears and fall on John's neck, and that might establish a dangerous precedent, for Ethel would undoubtedly follow suit, and you — well, you know how hysterically hero-worshipers are apt to act."

At this gibe Marion blushed a rosy red and hastened to change the topic of conversation to the apparently harmless subject of the sunset, but Bert — ever an awful tease — would not let her alone and hastened to add, "Yes, isn't it lovely, and its reflection on your cheeks is most becoming too, 'sister.'"

"Bert, stop teasing her immediately. And you know that she doesn't like to have you call her 'sister,'" said Ethel.

"Why not?" he asked in a most surprised and innocent tone. "I'm sure that she has given me that right by saying she'd be a sister to me times enough, alas. Beware these Southern girls, John. Their chief aim and occupation in life seems to be that of enticing poor deluded male creatures into their

nets, and then watching with fiendish glee while they beat out their little lives in a vain effort to escape." This he said in a jesting tone, but the look he gave me carried no merriment.

I gave an embarrassed laugh and replied, "I utterly refuse to believe any such calumny on Miss Lee."

"Thank you, Mr. Shaw. *Your* chief aim and occupation in life just at present at least, seems to be coming to the rescue of maidens in distress. This morning you saved little Janie, and now me, from the mire," responded the object of his slanderous remark.

"Don't pay any attention to Bert's ravings, Mr. Shaw," interpolated his sister Ethel. "If God chose to make Southern girls especially attractive to men, it's not their fault, and I'm sure Marion never gave Bert any encouragement, yet the fact is perfectly obvious that he is horribly jealous."

"Aha! my great secret is discovered at last," he returned with mock chagrin. "I admit the allegation, but, nevertheless, Marion, I feel it my duty to warn you not to flatter him too much. If you keep on as you have begun, John will become as 'stuck up,' metaphorically speaking, as he was actually, after the first mentioned rescue."

"Albert Aldrich, what on earth is the matter with you to-day?" again broke in Ethel. "I declare I

never heard you so downright nasty before; you're as catty as a woman."

"Heaven forbid!" he replied, but I, who knew as the others did not the hidden meaning which lay behind his remarks, agreed with Ethel, for Bert was ordinarily the mildest and most easy-going individual imaginable.

"One good turn deserves another," said Marion accepting his challenge, "and I don't intend to be influenced by any such slanderous statement. To prove that I don't place any credit in a word he has said, Mr. Shaw, I'm going to thrust upon you the honor of an invitation to ride with me some morning, which means that if you care to accept I will share with you my greatest pleasure, and it isn't everybody I would ask to accompany me."

"Huh, I don't see that *that's* such an honor. You've asked me," said Bert. "Besides, John, it means getting up at the ungodly hour of six A. M."

"I accept with the anticipation of much pleasure — that is, if I can get hold of a kind, gentle horse with a speed limit of ten miles an hour."

"Oh, I can arrange that for you, you can ride Bert's; he just fills the bill."

"What's the use of trying to engage in a battle of repartee with a girl like that," Bert responded. "However, the steed is yours, and I hope that he throws you. Moreover, I wish you joy of your

bargain. Getting up at six o'clock isn't my idea of a hilarious time."

"You can't frighten me a little bit. Fortunately, I'm not one of your effete New Yorkers who would have to be introduced to a sunrise."

"Bet I have seen more sunrises than you, you New England preacher, for all your national motto of 'early to bed and early to rise.'"

"Maybe so, but I meant as the prologue to the day, not the final act in an all night performance, young man. Furthermore, I assent most heartily to the proposition that the early morning hours really are the best of the whole day, and I'd agree with equal pleasure if Miss Lee had made it four-thirty. They say the sunrise from the cliffs is wonderful."

"Hopeless," groaned Bert.

"Splendid!" Marion cried enthusiastically. "Here is a man after my own heart. I've been simply crazy to do that very thing for days, but I didn't dare suggest going without an escort, and Bert would rather take a good licking than get up before eight. Are you really in earnest, Mr. Shaw?"

"Never more so."

"Good, we'll do it then. To-morrow, if it's pleasant?"

I assented with alacrity, from a mixture of mo-

tives. Aside from the pleasure inherent in such an adventure in company with a beautiful and fascinating girl was the fact that such a ride would give me a wonderful opportunity for further cementing our growing friendship and thus indirectly help me toward my goal — a similar footing of intimacy with her sister, Mrs. Willard.

Bert glared at me with frank disapproval, and Miss Margaret, as I was beginning like the others to think of the sister, interposed several conventional objections, over which my champion rode rough shod and laughing.

And so it was arranged, and it had come about that despite Bert's over-zealous efforts to save me from danger, real or imaginary, my chance acquaintance with Miss Lee was ripening into intimacy with the speed of an express train.

Further conversation was here forestalled by the arrival of the old colored butler to announce dinner, and Ethel Aldrich assigned me as escort and dinner companion to Miss Margaret.

The meal which ensued was as different from the dinner I had attended the evening previous, as day is from night. Marked simplicity and an atmosphere of homelike happiness was its distinguishing feature. Cocktails and highballs there were none, the only drink being a little mild and fragrant sherry. Instead of supercilious English butlers,

there were an aged colored man and a trim maid of the same race, who served the viands with an air of having a personal interest in supplying our every want,— the former frequently even with terms of endearment for the ladies — urging us to try just a little more of this or that.

The table was large, which made difficult any discussion or the bandying of words and ideas back and forth, and the little general conversation was quiet and on a high plane. Mr. and Mrs. Aldrich, both of whom were getting a little hard of hearing, sat side by side, Bert was placed between his real and his adopted sister and I had Miss Margaret practically to myself. Although now fast convalescing, she was still regarded as an invalid, and treated by all the family with a loving solicitude which indicated not only sympathy but a deep affection as well, and before I had talked with her ten minutes I knew the reason for their attitude.

During that meal there began to unfold before my mental vision one of the most lovely and lovable natures it has ever been my privilege to know, and each new day was to disclose new virtues to me.

Her character was obviously firm enough. I knew that this must be the case to have enabled her to take the step she had taken; she was high-spirited too — though not as impetuous as her sister — but her soul was so sweet and pure that her very

presence shed an influence of calm happiness around her. Indeed the two sisters, so much alike as to appearance, were wonderfully similar in nature as well, although the characteristics of each were more marked in different directions.

Marion was the more vivacious and fascinating, Margaret the quieter and more inspiring of confidences, and, unconsciously, I found myself telling her my whole life history — down to the time I became associated with Thomas, Richard and Henry, that is — and opening my heart as to many of my aims and ideals, as a man sometimes does to his mother or a much older friend and sometimes, though more rarely, to a sister.

So completely did I fall under the spell of her friendly charm that when there suddenly came to my mind the unbidden thought of how rapidly I was attaining to the plane of intimate friendship which I had planned in cold blood to achieve, I found it most distasteful. Margaret Lee was an object to be desired as a comrade for herself, not from any materialistic reasons, such as those which actuated my mission.

And yet I knew that my growing feeling for her was one of pure friendship only. My heart was warmed by her presence, but not thrilled, whereas whenever I glanced across the table and caught Marion's expressive eyes, now alluring, now flash-

ing, now filled sparkling with merriment, it started thumping anew without rime or reason.

Nor was I the only giver of confidences during dinner. My companion must have found some answering chord in my make-up, for she spoke simply but freely of her Virginia home, her family and recent bereavements, but as I had avoided mention of my particular mission, so she refrained from once speaking Roland Willard's name.

I had steered our conversation by some rather adroit questions — using the name of my Petersburg correspondent as a rudder — to their home plantation and that neighborhood, and was soon in possession of several new facts about that territory and the operations of the lumber company which had been trying so desperately to purchase part of their possessions, and took the opportunity of slipping in a disguised warning against that corporation and the suggestion that they tell the whole matter to their family lawyer and thereafter act only upon his advice.

Altogether the meal was to me a most delightful one, and when the signal to rise and repair to the drawing-room for coffee was given, I breathed a sigh of regret.

CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH I LOSE MY HEAD AND HEART

A FLOOD of golden moonlight half illuminated the room, casting a spell of enchantment over the familiar objects, and as we entered, Ethel cried, "Oh, let's sit without the lights for a while and have Marion play. It would be a sacrilege to banish this fairy illumination with modern electricity."

I thought and said so, too, and Marion straightway went to the piano without needing to be urged as do so many artists; a fact which takes half the enjoyment away from their playing.

She sat for a moment with her hands resting quietly on the keys and her gaze out of the window, and then began to draw from the very heart of the instrument that immortal, soulful melody, Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata."

The pale radiance from the low hanging orb fell full upon her and as I stood motionless by the pianoforte, scarcely feeling myself breathe, my eyes fixed immovably upon her lovely face, I knew of a sudden and with a deep sense of awe, that there was no other mate in the wide world for me.

So intent was my gaze, which must have come more from my soul than from my eyes, that when she finished, she turned slowly toward me as though her will were drawn to mine as a needle to a magnetic pole, and without lowering her own eyes she looked up into mine for a brief moment which, nevertheless, seemed to hold all the meaning of eternity for me.

Then Bert moved restlessly. Her eyes dropped, and a warm flush overspread her face and neck, a flush which even the cold moonlight could not disguise.

I do not know whether any of the others in the room felt that strange telepathic message, but I suspect that Bert did, for he broke the spell almost immediately by jumping up quickly, and switched on the lights, saying with forced lightness, "It's darned lucky for Paderewski that he didn't hear you then, 'sister'; he would have been green with jealousy. 'Twould be altogether too bad if the heart of that great artist, who has tried so hard to cling to the top of the ladder these many years, were broken by the hopeless despair of ever equaling your inspired touch. And, speaking of 'touch,' John, my *own* heart was pitifully touched at witnessing your expression of pained bewilderment over the intricacies of that composition.

"You must know that John's musical education,"

he said, turning to the others, "came to an abrupt stop when it was in a 'Pinafore.' This is more suitable to his appreciation. Move over, 'sister,'" and, sliding into her place on the bench, he began to rattle off the song from that ever favorite Gilbert and Sullivan opera, which runs, "He loves, and loves, alas, above his station," putting so much stress upon the repeat, "Ah, yes, the lass is much above his station," that the implication seemed to me pointed almost to an insult.

I managed to join in the laugh which followed, but at the same time felt myself grow hot and cold by turns, and I received the impression that some of the rest laughed without the convincing ring. Furthermore, a covert glance around showed me that Ethel's look was reproachful, Margaret's troubled, and Marion's eyes were flashing ominously.

What mad impulse drove me to pick up the gauntlet I do not know, for I had always been extremely reticent about displaying my abilities as a musician before strangers, but the plain fact remains that I answered curtly, "Bert underestimates my musical appreciation, Miss Lee. I understood! Indeed, my intimates have frequently told me that my taste in music far outstrips my poor ability to follow, and with all due respect to Messrs. Gilbert and Sullivan, their light melodies do not satisfy my soul — to-night. Some such composition as this

has a stronger appeal to me," and, without waiting for even the suggestion of an invitation, I strode to the pianoforte, and, displacing Bert, began Chadwick's masterly arrangement of the " Bedouin Love Song," with a fiery intensity which surprised even myself.

I had been told more than once half in jest, that I had missed my vocation and that I possessed a voice which might have marked me for a singer of more than ordinary ability had I gone into music seriously, but never, before nor since, have I sung as I sang then, with a warmth of tone and feeling which did not seem to be my own. For the moment I must have been touched with a divine inspiration, and the words, " I love thee, I love but thee, with a love that shall not die," rang out with a passion which shook my very soul.

When I ended no one spoke for a moment, and the air was charged as with an electric current.

Then Marion's low voice broke the silence. " Thank you." Her quiet, well-controlled tone and frank look removed this perhaps ambiguous phrase to the commonplace.

Instantly came the mental reaction, and I found myself thinking, " What an absurd young fool you are, John Shaw, thus to wear your heart upon your sleeve for daws to peck at, or to imagine for an instant that even if Miss Lee should read the

hidden message in my song, such a melodramatic exhibition could appeal to her." It was the height of mad presumption. I had known her, even as a mere acquaintance, only a few short hours. I felt myself growing hot again, this time with embarrassment.

Bert came to my rescue while at the same time continuing his ragging of me, by saying, "Wonderful. You sing with a pathos which can only come as the result of long practice. How many girls have you sung that to with such feeling, since that little Spanish Señorita at Cambridge, John?"

His gibe carried my effort from the sublime to the ridiculous, and I did not know whether to feel angry or relieved, but before I could deny the accusation, as I was minded to, the sound of a motor car on the driveway outside interrupted, and the possible arrival of some one else, caused Margaret to rise hurriedly and say, "If all of you will excuse me, I think I will retire. Somehow I don't yet feel strong enough to meet strangers." But from her somewhat nervous manner I imagined an entirely different reason for her disinclination to meet people.

She came to me with outstretched hand as I rose, and thanked me most sincerely for our pleasant conversation during dinner and for my song,

and then with a hurried "good-night," departed, in company with her sister.

They left the room with their arms about one another's waists, and it seemed to me that I had never seen so lovely a picture of young womanhood and sisterly affection.

As I turned about, after escorting them to the doorway, I found myself face to face with Manners, who had just stepped into the room through one of the open Venetian windows from the porch.

I stopped short in surprise and anger, but he showed no embarrassment, making the easy-going greeting, "Good evening, everybody," and then, as though just catching sight of me, "Ah, good evening, Mr. Shaw."

"Hello, Manners," said Bert. "Didn't know that you were acquainted with Shaw."

"I have had that pleasure," was the suave answer. "Indeed he dined with me last night."

"So. I didn't know that you had joined the four hundred, John."

"Yes, indeed," I replied to conceal my true feeling with a tone of levity, "last night I was initiated into the mysteries of that famous company as the four hundred and first member —"

"Which leaves you just outside the pale," interrupted Bert. This remark seemed to me to be carrying his insinuations beyond the limit, and I

saw Manners smile ever so slightly, but he changed the conversation instantly by saying,

"I heard a bit of news to-day which reminded me most forcibly that I haven't been overneighborly of late. The news was that you had a guest staying with you, that said guest was a young lady, and said young lady most attractive."

"Knowing you fairly well, as I do," drawled Bert, "the news of such a combination — which happens to be true in all respects — is quite sufficient reason for this sudden realization of your lapses. To tell the truth, I've been rather surprised that your smiling countenance hasn't been seen on the scene long ere this. Always thought, you know, that you were possessed of a seventh sense which led you instinctively and unerringly to the spot where happened to be any fair damsel. Mr. Manners is our very greatest little squire of dames, John," he added for my enlightenment, "and the very faintest swish of a woman's skirt brings him bounding to the spot eager for conquest."

This characterization did not seem to please its subject any too well, and I gathered that Bert held some animosity toward his neighbor, or else was thoroughly out of sorts to-night and correspondingly sharp in speech.

"It's no such thing," interrupted Ethel, as always ready to fight on the side of the oppressed.

"Bert's jealous again, this time over Mr. Manners' deserved popularity with our sex, and I may add that if more of you were as considerate and attentive as he is, this dreary world would be a merrier place for poor down-trodden females."

"Ouch," responded her brother. "Every time I open my mouth I seem to put my foot in it. But Manners knows that I'm joking, and I might as well plead guilty to the accusation of being chronically jealous of his successes in that line. When he enters the lists we other mere men have to be content to be classed as 'also rans.'"

"Such fulsome flattery is wholly unmerited," observed Manners. "The fact that I'm still a mournful bachelor at forty ought to be sufficient to prove that I'm nothing like the success as a lady killer that you would make me out to be."

"Not necessarily," said Ethel. "You may be particularly careful —"

"Or lucky," finished Bert.

"Well, anyway, I hope that you'll refrain from giving me such a reputation to your present guest. May I ask who she is?"

"You may. She's an old friend of the family, a Miss Lee from Virginia."

"Surely you don't mean *the* Miss Lee, sister of the belle who was married to Roland Willard last month?"

"Why 'surely'? Are you so surprised that we should have such a celebrity as our guest? I assure you that such is the fact."

Manners started ever so slightly, glanced hastily at me, but I assumed as innocent an expression as possible, and I thought that he assumed that I had either taken no notice of his remarks about the Lees the previous evening, or had forgotten them.

"Not surprised, but highly delighted. From all reports Miss Lee —"

He stopped suddenly, for at this moment Marion herself appeared in the door, and I saw a look which I did not enjoy, pass over his face at the first sight of her radiant loveliness.

Formal introductions were made, and almost immediately Ethel suggested an adjournment to the cooler veranda, a plan which found a hearty seconder in me, for, as the company was now constituted, I had no wish to hear Marion play again, as she might have been persuaded to had we remained indoors.

It would be hopeless to try to recount the general conversation and swift repartee which followed for the next half hour, but before that period of time was ended I had to admit to myself, begrudgingly, that if this were a fair sample, Manners' successes with the fair sex were fairly earned. Never had I listened to such a finished conversationalist,

and though I soothed my harrowed feelings with the thought that his talk was wholly superficial, I could not but acknowledge that it was highly entertaining, and his wit as keen as rapier play.

Manners' conversation fairly sparkled and scintillated, and his fund of information, whether superficial or not, was truly amazing. He knew when to listen intelligently as well, and quite naturally the more his marked superiority to me in these social graces was borne in upon my mind, the glummer and glummer I correspondingly became, and the more I withdrew into my tent and sulked.

Moreover, my perturbed state of mind was not helped any as I saw that Marion was most favorably impressed with the new guest, and was enjoying his lively humor to the utmost, generally giving as good as she got in the fine interplay of wits.

My disaffection became so patent that after a while Bert leaned over and said in a whispered aside, "What the deuce has come over you, John? You're about as festive as a clam, and as nervous as a cat, which is certainly an astonishing amalgamation of animal attributes, to use alliteration's artful aid."

"Let'us get away from here for a moment. There's something I want to tell you," said I, acting upon a sudden intuitive impulse to take him into my confidence on the one matter which I had not

previously mentioned. Excusing ourselves on the ground that I must collect my tennis belongings, we went up to Bert's room.

There I immediately disclosed to him all that I had heard Manners tell about his interest in the Lee woodlands, the remark Mr. Hammond had made in regard to what might be expected of him if he met Miss Lee in Newport, and what I had myself done in the matter.

"Whew!" whistled Bert. "The plot thickens for fair, and you've certainly got your nerve right with you, but I can't think of any better plan than you have acted on. If you succeed in beating Manners in this scheme I raise the flag, and if you need any money to put it through and don't want to call on Willard, why just say the word and I'll shake a few coins out of the baby's bank for you myself."

"Thanks, old man," I said, gripping his hand. "I'm glad to have some one else whom I can confer with, but what's worrying me principally just this minute is the way that snake is insinuating himself into her friendship. Talk about 'nerve.' He must know that I heard his damaging admissions last night, and yet look at him to-night."

"Oh, you can set your mind at rest on that point. There is no need of worrying yet over the progress that he seems to be making toward Miss Lee's

friendship. She is a mere chicken in years, but, nevertheless, she's too old a bird in experience with men to be caught by the kind of chaff he is using. Besides, if it goes too far I can drop a hint —"

"For the Lord's sake, don't do that!" I broke in, in some alarm. "Judging from what I've seen, or heard, rather, this afternoon, your hints generally result in just the opposite occurring from what you intend."

"It has apparently proven so in *your* case," he replied with some heat. "But, seriously, John — to change the subject for a moment — I have been and am dead in earnest in trying to prevent you from letting your feelings become entangled here."

"Why?" I asked bluntly, somewhat piqued by these continued warnings.

"Oh, hang it all, I can't tell you outright, but you ought to be able to draw your own conclusions. Now, don't get sore, old fellow, and if you've got an idea that I have anything against you personally please disabuse your mind of it forthwith. Only under the present conditions and the way society is constituted — damn it, I don't know how to put it, John, but I wish for your own sake that you would go easy. I feel as though I'd been acting like a cad this afternoon and to-night, but I know that my advice is sound. Won't you follow it and ask no questions?"

"All right, Bert," I responded a bit penitently, "I'll do my best to be good. But as to the other matter, if worse comes to worse I'll take the chance of getting in wrong myself by warning Miss Lee against this fellow impostor. However, I wanted you to know just why I dislike and fear your neighbor."

"I see. Go as far as you like in the dislike line; we don't any of us love him too well in spite of his position in society, and he really is a devil with the women."

"So I should judge, and now that the atmosphere is clear again, let us go down and face the common foe."

When we reached the veranda, Manners was just rising to take his departure, having the wisdom not to overstay his welcome on the first call and to leave while the impression he had made was strongest.

"Jump in my car, Shaw," he said pleasantly; "I go past your place." I wanted to stay a little while after he had gone, but there seemed to be no good reason for refusing, and I, therefore, accepted his invitation with as good grace as possible and began to make my own adieux.

As I held Miss Lee's hand a moment in saying good night she said, "You won't forget our engagement for to-morrow morning, Mr. Shaw."

"I may forget to go to bed — probably shall — but you may be sure that I won't forget *that,* Miss Lee. From the desert I'll come to thee on Bert's stallion, shod with fire, and the night wind shall hear my cry, 'Come on down.'" She laughed merrily at my misquotation and answered, "You will find me waiting for you. For a few hours then, good-by."

I turned from her with the warm pressure of her hand still thrilling me, to the uncertainty which the coming ride with my enemy held.

His own farewell was the acme of good breeding, and his request for me to precede him into the car, as pleasant as a May morning.

We sailed away from the house with the easy gliding motion and gentle purr which distinguishes a perfect engine, but no sooner were we well away from the Aldriches' than Manners rapidly increased the speed and in a few seconds we were rushing madly down the curving drive into the blackness of the night. He took the corner at terrific speed, and although the machine responded perfectly to his master touch upon the wheel, it nevertheless protested angrily at such abuse, swerving like an outraged broncho.

My heart verily rose into my mouth, but by keeping my teeth tightly clinched, I managed to retain it as part of my anatomy, and at the same time re-

strain an almost irrepressible impulse to cry out.

Suddenly it occurred to me that, for some reason or other, Manners was endeavoring to shake my nerve. With this thought I braced myself mentally, and, outwardly at least, remained as cool and imperturbable as he himself — and he drove with the skill and daring of a maniac. After a moment or two he slowed the machine down a little and spoke, it seemed to me, nervously.

"Shaw, you and I don't seem to get along very well. I may as well frankly admit a feeling of antipathy toward you, although I can't imagine why I should care a hang one way or the other, where you are concerned."

I remained discreetly silent, and he was forced to continue to lead. "Last night I — er — perhaps indiscreetly happened to mention a certain personal business matter in your hearing." I still said nothing, and he went on, feeling his way, "I think that you know to what I am referring."

"Yes," I answered briefly, and he added suavely, "I assume that you are too much of a gentleman to make use of any information so gained, even if it were of any value to you — and, of course, in this case it is not."

Again I refrained from replying to his implied question, and he asked a little sharply, "I am right, am I not?"

"Considering the subject matter of your 'indiscreet' disclosure, do you think, Mr. Manners, that there is any necessity of bringing the question of being a 'gentleman' into this discussion?" I answered as coolly as possible.

"Am I to understand that you are thinking of trying to make use of that information against me?" he queried in feigned surprise.

"I have not said so," was my calm retort which proved exasperating, for he went on rather hotly. "See here, Shaw, we might as well come to an understanding in this matter. Do you want me to get the idea that you are the kind of a fellow who would deliberately take advantage of information, given in confidence, which you accidentally obtained in the house of your host, and —"

"I don't see that there is anything to be gained by becoming insulting, Mr. Manners, and besides, the information was not imparted in confidence to me," I broke in, wishing to lead him on and find out just what he was driving at, and my words had the desired effect, for he replied with a flash of anger that he could not hide,

"Oh, you don't, don't you?" and then regaining his outward composure, he added smilingly, "I hope that, under the circumstances, you will not consider it unpardonable, but — well, the fact is that, acting on impulse this morning, I had my personal repre-

sentative in Boston look you up rather carefully."

"Well?"

"Well, the information which he telephoned me this evening was somewhat interesting — sufficiently so to lead one to draw the conclusion that things are not always what they seem," he added, meditatively knocking the ashes from his cigar.

"Yes?"

"Yes. I don't suppose that it is any crime for a lawyer's clerk, who gets twenty-five or thirty dollars a week to pass himself off in Newport in the guise of a wealthy society man, and thus secure the hospitality of one of our set, given under a misapprehension — it's been done before — but —"

"Don't let that thought disturb you, sir. You are at perfect liberty to tell Mr. Hammond yourself, if you desire. I may as well tell you now, however, that it will be no news to him."

"So? And knowing that, he brought you around to my house and let you play cards with me for a thousand dollars, when you probably hadn't ten in your pocket. I owe him one for that. But be that as it may. I was going to add, when interrupted, that it is somewhat more serious to play the same sort of game on a rich, young heiress — may we say Miss Lee, for example? You may have heard the word 'fortune-hunter,' and know that a certain odium attaches thereto."

This thrust stuck a tender spot, and I must have winced enough to show him that he had scored at last, for he added with an unpleasant laugh, "The junior clerk in the office of Roland Willard's attorneys — for such I'm told is your job — would be a splendid match for his little sister-in-law."

So he knew with whom I was associated, too! This thought worried me more than a little, for although I cared not at all whether he disclosed my real financial condition to Miss Lee, my plan would be dealt a death blow if he inadvertently mentioned to her that I was in the employ of Willard's counsel.

"I don't, of course, pretend to know just what your little game is, but I do know enough to make it rather unpleasant for you here in Newport, and perhaps at the Aldriches' as well, if I should feel forced to."

"What's the answer?" I asked apparently very much disheartened.

"Why, simply that if you are a wise young man, you will decide that discretion is the better part of valor, and forget all about the little break I made. Nevertheless, I'm a man of business, Shaw, and I think I'll make you a little proposition that you will probably recognize the advantage of ascribing to — that is, if you will first answer a question or two, and I pay you the compliment of assuming that you will answer them truthfully."

"And the questions?"

"Have you as yet told Miss Lee anything about me, or even hinted to her regarding what I said?"

"No."

"Nor your employers, Mr. Willard's counsel?"

"No."

"Nor any one likely to tell them?"

"No."

"Needless to say, I'm glad to hear it, and that being the case I will agree to keep under my hat what I know, if you will promise to keep silent about what you have learned. You see, we're both in the same boat."

"Agreed," said I, shortly, with an inward sigh of relief, although I could scarcely believe my ears when he had so worded his questions that I was able to answer all of them truthfully and yet not divulge that fact that I had already set the wheel in motion to frustrate his carefully laid plans. In trying to be explicit and cover all the ground he had left me the one loop-hole of escape wide open. I was now apparently safe to pursue the even tenor of my course without fear from his direction.

Mr. Hammond was waiting for me, and hugely enjoyed my somewhat expurgated account of the doings of the afternoon and evening, especially the part relating to Manners' nerve in seeking the acquaintance of Miss Lee as he had prophesied that

he would. Needless to say, I made no mention of my flat disregard of his warning signal where the same young lady was concerned, but he may have had his suspicions when I spoke of the morrow's ride with her.

However, he did not attempt to repeat his advice, but rather insisted that I use one of his own horses upon that expedition, and straightway called up his stable-keeper, and ordered a safe and sane steed for 4 A. M.— for I admitted that I was no cowboy.

And, needless to say, I slept but little the rest of that night, what with my mind keyed up by the events of the day, the thought of my new bitter-sweet secret, and with looking at my watch every half hour.

CHAPTER XIII

IN WHICH TWO START OUT AND THREE RETURN

ROMANTIC I felt indeed the following day as I rode through the gray mist of early morn toward the abode of my enchantress.

No one was astir when I arrived at the Aldriches' and the mansion appeared to be still wrapped in slumber. I pulled up uncertainly wondering how to proceed, and as I did so heard the click of a shutter above me, glanced up and saw a lovely arm bare to the elbow, and a few inches of creamy white lace in the aperture, and heard a sweet voice call softly, "You caught me napping — actually as well as figuratively — and I'm covered with shame, and not a great deal else," the last words were spoken so low that I scarcely heard them.

"Please wait just a moment and I'll show you that one woman at least can dress expeditiously." The arm disappeared and I dismounted to wait resignedly, but Miss Marion was as good as her word and in a shorter time than I could have accomplished it, was down on the portico arrayed in a neat riding habit and appearing as fresh and bright as a dew-washed flower.

"There is no necessity for my going to the cliffs for the sunrise," I said gallantly. "Your presence has dispelled the night."

"A speech worthy even of a Virginian," she answered, smiling brightly. "You are far more romantic and interesting this morning than during the latter part of last evening."

"Ah, but now there is no rival present to put me in eclipse, you see. I have the inspiration all to myself."

"Isn't this delightfully romantic? I've done lots and lots of unusual things, but this is a brand new experience, and sister scolded me dreadfully last night for my bad, bold behavior. It's just like an elopement, isn't it?"

For an instant the mad impulse possessed me to seize this opening to suggest that we turn it into a real one, but cooler judgment immediately prevailed and I answered in the same light vein, "Yes, but hopelessly old fashioned. I wouldn't think of asking a modern maiden to elope with me in anything less than an aëroplane."

"I'm not so sure but that the old way was best," she replied pensively.

In a few minutes we were riding at a brisk trot down Bellevue Avenue, my inaptitude on horseback preventing me from conversing freely, and the joy of the morning and the exhilarating exercise sufficing

for her. The few remarks that we did exchange were all on the subject of health-giving sport, and we quickly found a kinship in our love of games and the out of doors.

As we rode, the sky in the east changed from pearl gray to mauve, then to faint lilac, and then became filled of a sudden with a warm golden glow.

We reached the end of the Avenue, drew rein and faced our horses toward the Orient, and now, as though nature had been waiting for this signal, the couriers of Aurora, swift flashes of light, ran up the heavens, an inestimable army of attendants in multi-colored gay array followed, covering the sky with a spreading glory more beautiful than a sunset, and then the fiery sun himself sprang into view, causing the waves on the curving bay to dance with joy at his coming.

Neither of us spoke for several minutes while this gorgeous spectacle was being enacted before our eyes. Then my companion sighed regretfully, "It was worth it, wasn't it?"

"It was magnificent, but I did not need the sunrise to make my ride worth while," I responded, in a low voice. She did not reply, but once more a flush not attributable to the color still lingering in the heavens, mounted over her cheeks.

At last with one accord we wheeled about and rode slowly along the Ocean Drive. Miss Lee was

very silent and I waited patiently for her to shake off the spell of the vision.

Finally she said thoughtfully, "How much we creatures of civilization miss after all. How few of us ever see that glorious picture which nature paints anew almost daily with such prodigal liberality. Our lives and interests are so restricted and narrowed in some ways by conventionality, that all the manifold beauties of the natural world have come to mean very little to any of us. I often wonder if it is really worth while."

"I know. I sometimes have the same feeling. In gaining so little we have lost so much."

"That's just it. The primal savage, whose life seems to us so narrow and meaningless, had an appreciation of the natural universe which we have lost utterly. We boast of our vaunted progress and the constant broadening of our horizon. Intellectually it is true, but — I wonder. To most of us a rock is merely something hard to stumble over and be gotten out of the way; a tree is shade, or a thing to get wood from; grass is something to keep off of and cut, and I doubt if any of them mean as much even to your trained geologist or botanist as to the untutored savage who vested them with spirits and made them his friends or enemies.

"Civilization with all its man-made laws, hasn't made the world better, in one way. There is in-

finitely less crime among the animals of the forest than among men. They obey nature's laws absolutely and need no others. They love and mate and rear their offspring with none of the narrowing restrictions of man which kill the spirit. Oh, why can't we have their joy of freedom?" she flung her arms wide in a gesture of protest.

"That is one of the penalties of progress," I answered rather lamely, for I, too, was affected by her mood induced by the spell of nature, and would have liked to have thrown custom and laws to the winds and, like the savage of old, taken her then and there and carried her away to my cave or wigwam. "Knowledge brings with it evil as well as good. Nature is unmoral, but along with civilization comes active morality and immorality, good and bad, and laws and conventions must need go hand in hand with them, to restrain the awakened imagination and the growing capabilities for harm."

"Bromide," she replied. "Of course your arguments are unanswerable, but they don't answer the big question 'Is it all worth while?' My intellect tells me that I am talking nonsense and that it *is* the best way, or God would not have so ordained it, but at times, times like this, my soul revolts. I'm a good deal of a savage at heart, I guess."

"And are we not all of us?" I answered. "Our civilization is, after all, only the thin veneer laid on

by a few ages which count as nothing as against the innumerable ones which went before. The primeval feelings are deeply ingrained, and we are still children of nature and nature's laws, however much we may rant about the power of the mind over matter. The two great wŏrld-old instincts, self-preservation and propagation, are as strong among our most advanced peoples as among the lowest animals, and it is no wonder that there come times when all of us hear the atavistic call of the wild, and we feel like harking back to the so-called 'good old days when the world was young'— which, as a matter of fact, weren't good old days at all."

"Yes, we haven't advanced very far on the road to perfection after all, and since our primal instincts are the same as of old, how unjust seem many of our pretty conventionalities and restrictions. Mr. Shaw, do you believe in divorce?"

This surprising question, coming like a bolt out of the blue, staggered me and almost left me speechless.

Putting two and two together, I quickly concluded that the trend of our unusually serious conversation had carried her thoughts to the law which had welded and must be made to break asunder her sister's distasteful marriage bond — the only solution from her standpoint.

"My answer must be the unsatisfactory, hydra-

headed one of 'yes and no,'" I replied, choosing my words carefully, for I knew that whatever I said might be used against me later. "May I inquire why you ask that peculiar question in connection with our present conversation?"

"Why, I should think that the connection was obvious. Marriage is a man-made institution, not one of nature, and death and divorce are the only ways which man-made law recognizes for terminating it. Somehow my whole soul cries out this morning for the natural life, for freedom from restrictive rules and confining conventions. I'm kicking against the pricks. You mustn't think, Mr. Shaw, that I am a new woman or a 'feminist.' We Southern girls are brought up along old-fashioned lines, and this is a personal — perhaps merely temporary — revolt on my part, but a morning like this, when all the world seems so free and joyous, I can't help feeling that every one should have an inalienable right to be as happy as possible — especially women. Heaven knows that their lives nowadays are seldom their own to live in liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Modern rules and conventions restrict a man, but they fetter a woman, and, even aside from this inequality, his interests are so much broader and more varied than hers, that were their effect the same, he would not ever be bound down as she is. A man's home and family may be a principal part

of, but they are not his whole world. They are a woman's. The institution of marriage and bearing of children could not persist, if her very existence were not bound up in her husband and children — if they were not her very life. But see how custom and law act. They say, 'with this man you shall live willy nilly, no matter if, after marriage, you discover that you have made an appalling mistake, that that which you thought was real love was only fascination, perhaps only the romantic fiction that a young girl so often weaves about the person of her lover, especially if he is considerably older and seems very grand to her.' What matters it if after the wedding she finds that she was mistaken in the man, and that he is not all she believed him to be, the die is irrevocably cast — no, don't speak! I know what you would say, that *that* is the almost inevitable result. I suppose it is, but now I don't mean in the little human frailties, but in something really important — something that counts. Is it right, is it just that she should be confined to a life of mental torture within her narrow circle with such a partner, simply because the marriage law says, 'till death do ye part,' and the civil law adds, 'for this or that reason only will we dissolve the bond'?

"Why, don't you see that many of the causes that man in his finite wisdom has selected as suffi-

cient reason for decreeing a divorce, would not cause the wife anything like the mental anguish that comes from utter uncongeniality with her husband?"

She paused a moment, almost breathless from the force of her own invectives, and I was too astounded at this surprisingly frank and thoughtful discussion on the lips of little more than a girl, to attempt to answer her.

"Why should she and her right to seek and find happiness elsewhere be ruthlessly sacrificed just because man-created law and custom say they must?"

She was breathing quickly, her cheeks flaming and every nerve and muscle was responding to her wrought-up feelings. "What a woman this is." I thought, "With all this force and strength of character not tamed, but merely molded and directed by the all-powerful influence of love, where could I find another like her?"

I was facing a difficult situation, however. If this was the way she and her sister felt now about divorce, and I couldn't change their attitude of mind, my mission was doomed to abject failure at the outset. With no too great confidence I began:

"The answer as it seems to me — and I must admit to being too young in wisdom to hope to qualify as a sage — is just because, as you just said

yourself, 'law and custom say they must.' I can't pretend to say 'here is the real reason for things as they now exist,' nobody can, the whole question is too big, too complex, but, in my mind, it works out something like this.

"With the growth of the intellect and knowledge (which is not at all synonymous with wisdom), came a corresponding weakening in the primitive animal instincts and powers. A real family life became necessary for the protection of the children in infancy, and, for this, a real marriage became absolutely essential, as you know, for this is merely elementary sociology. This institution *did* come from heaven in the sense that it was a necessary adjunct to God's plan for the development of the world and mankind. Marriage is the safeguard of the family and the home, and as such — as the prayerbook service says — not a thing to be entered into or regarded lightly, not yet a tie to be broken lightly, as the law says in confirmation.

"This general rule is the outgrowth of plain necessity. There are, doubtless, men and women perfectly capable of living noble, upright, and, in the truest sense, virtuous lives together out of wedlock, and so, too, there are people who would be mutually and inestimably benefited by a dissolution of the marriage tie between them — people who have found that they made a mistake in choosing their

mates. Such people are of a high moral fiber who do not need the restraining influence of law or custom in order to develop morally. But these are infinitesimal in number compared with the millions whose passions and impulses *do* need some check from without because of their human frailties. Custom and laws, the product of what mankind has found to be for its own good through the ages, furnish this necessary check. Where they work well for the mass of men and women, they are beneficent customs, good laws. I won't pretend but that some few individuals may, nay, must, suffer from them, but in Mother Nature's big plan the individual counts for nothing, the race for everything."

"I see that you are not only a champion of the theories of sociology, but can see no wrong in the law — just as I might have expected from a lawyer," she interrupted, somewhat bitterly.

"As to the first statement, unequivocally 'yes'; as to the second you are wrong. Undoubtedly the law, as a whole, is as good as man with his countless limitations can make it, but it is a human not a divine product, and I'll admit freely that although it is good as a statement of general working principles, it often results in injustice and harm to individuals. The rules of our divorce courts, which you seem to regard as so unjust, of course fall under my general proposition, and now in answer to

your original question I can say that I do believe in divorce, but only to the extent it is permitted by the laws of a conservative state, like my own for example. Mankind has realized that not to allow the marriage tie to be broken under any circumstances would be both unjust and wicked, but, on the other hand, to permit it to be dissolved almost at will — which is pretty nearly what your plea amounts to — would soon be fatal to that necessary institution.

" We are all of us still creatures of impulse, blown hither and thither by the winds of passion. If men and women were free to break the marriage bond because of a passing whim — one which they might deeply regret on sober second thought — the whole system would soon fall, free love would result, morals would disappear, and in time civilization would revert, much faster indeed than it has been built up, and ' the last state would be worse than the first.'

" It seems to me that every thinking person must ascribe to this, and especially we Americans who have been brought up to believe in the sacredness of the majority, and to bow to it without rancor, however much its rule may be opposed to our own interests as we see them. We, of all people, ought to ascribe to the laws whose purpose is to serve the masses, not favored individuals."

" Doubtless you are right — in theory — but isn't it pretty hard on the special individuals who must

suffer through no fault of their own?" she answered thoughtfully.

"I have already admitted that. And of course the knowledge that the law which injures them is in fact a good law, doesn't help any. There is one other consideration however, which neither of us have yet taken into account, which should come to their aid."

"What is that?"

"The Christian ideal of the necessity and beauty of self sacrifice of the individual for the good of others. We cannot possibly tell how great harm may come from the refusal of one man or woman to ascribe to the law, even though their own souls may justify them absolutely in the stand which they take. They may not themselves suffer,—although any one who opposes custom is pretty sure to, sooner or later,—but because of their selfish act many others with less provocation may be led astray and damned."

"'Almost thou dost persuade me,'" she answered sadly. "But you must not forget that in the ordinary individual who finds himself or herself in the clutch of the fell circumstances which I have suggested, the older instinct of self preservation at whatever cost is pretty likely to be paramount. Anybody can generalize as you have been doing, but how much do generalizations count to the heart and

soul in revolt? Only a truly great spirit, like Christ's, can sacrifice itself without a murmur in such a case. Could you?"

Again the sudden and unexpectedly personal question startled me. After a long pause I replied, "I don't know. I only hope that I may never be so tested."

Of course our discussion and dissertations had been frequently interrupted by pauses and questions, and now we had nearly completed the circle and were entering the old town from the west.

We had been riding in intimate silence for a time after this remark of mine, when I heard the sound of another horse's hoofs, and suddenly out of a side street appeared my bête noire, Manners, at the gallop.

I was far from pleased to see him. Moreover I thought that a shadow of regret passed over Miss Lee's face, but the intruder's countenance wore a smile, although the look he gave me was not pleasant, his expression being one of mingled triumph and hostility.

"Bless my soul, do my eyes deceive me?" he cried, drawing up suddenly directly in front of us, and I felt instinctively that this was in reality no chance meeting, and that having drawn his own conclusions from our parting words the night before, he had deliberately set out to intercept us.

But he continued gayly, ignoring the coolness of his reception, "If the old saying about early birds gathering the worms is true, you two must have cornered the market in annelids this morning."

Miss Lee greeted him pleasantly but without answering the implied quære or attempting to explain our morning's occupation. My own greeting was decidedly churlish, I am afraid.

Without waiting for an invitation, he wheeled about and joined himself to our company, and I forthwith withdrew into my shell again, thankful for even the small comfort afforded by the thought that we were nearly home.

Manners chatted lightly, but the pace Miss Lee set precluded any great amount of conversation, and as he came in view of the house she interrupted to issue an inclusive challenge for a race to the stable, and we were off at the gallop.

She was a wonderful rider, Manners no less so. On they flew neck and neck, with me a poor third and steadily losing ground.

Just as they passed the house he drew rein sufficiently to let her go in winner by a nose, his gentlemanly conduct only gaining the unspoken characterization, "hypocrite" from me, and I rode up a moment later with my heart hot with indignation over this anticlimatic ending to my wonderful morning.

As we came to a standstill and were dismounting — I none too gracefully for I was decidedly stiff — Bert appeared on the side veranda with a napkin over his arm and vigorously beating away at a Chinese gong, and shouting, "Last call for breakfast in the dining-car. Come on, John, there's a bowl of mush and milk set out for you. 'Morning, Manners."

The fact that no similar invitation was extended to the latter cheered me up considerably, and once more I realized what a real friend at heart I had in Bert, thus on my behalf to ignore the rules of hospitality.

CHAPTER XIV

IN WHICH AN ENGAGEMENT OCCURS

When breakfast was over, the various members of the family departed one by one to their several duties or engagements. Even Bert, with the freedom born of old friendship, left me, taking it for granted that I could amuse myself for a little while, and in fact this seeming discourtesy pleased me mightily for it told its own story of how truly I was becoming regarded as "one of the family."

Before she went to her room to get off some correspondence Miss Marion gave me her hand with a clasp of comradeship, saying,

"I want to thank you now, Mr. Shaw — in case I shouldn't see you again this morning — for our wonderful ride, and — and all the rest. I can not promise to ascribe to all your ideas, but I shan't forget either them or the sunrise."

I have said that all the members of the family departed from me? Not so. Little Janet straightway annexed herself to me, calmly but firmly refusing to go on her usual morning walk with her nurse, and after leading me, a willing subject, to a Gloucester hammock on the piazza, appropriated a seat in

my lap. I loved children passionately so her company was no cross to me, but her very first questions — and I knew enough of four-year olds to look for a perfect flood of them — proved rather embarrassing, or would have, had any one else been present.

"Has you any little girls, Unke John?"

"No, dear, I'm sorry to say I haven't any little girls."

"Why hasn't you any little girls, Unke John?"

"Oh, because I'm an old bachelor and never got married, I expect."

"Does you has to be married to have little girls?"

"Yes, dear."

"Why? I should sink ol' bach'lors would specially want little girls. They must get awful lonesome."

"They do get lonesome many times."

"Then why don't you get married and have some little girls, Unke John."

"Oh, I don't know. I guess nobody'd have me."

"Wouldn't Auntie Lee have you?"

"I never asked her, but I don't believe she would."

"Why?"

"Oh, because."

"Muvver says 'because' isn't any reason, Unke John."

"Well, it isn't usually, sweetheart, but I could not think of any other just then." This seemed to satisfy her as an answer, but in a moment she began the inquisition again.

"Would you like to marry Auntie Lee, Unke John?"

"You bet I would."

"You mustn't say 'you bet,' Unke John, Muvver says so."

"Mother's right as usual. I take back the 'you bet' part."

"I sink Auntie Lee's awful mean if she won't marry you"—a pause—"but if she won't, I will, Unke John." This spoken with deep resignation.

"Why, thank you, dear. That would be lovely."

"Now we're 'gaged. You may kiss me." I tilted back the sweet little flowerlike face and obeyed, wishing ardently that it belonged to one other.

She settled herself more comfortably and said, "Now you must tell me a story."

The idea of having to tell a story as the logical results of becoming engaged struck me as particularly appropriate. Most men do, many of them. So I began immediately. 'Once upon a time when your betrothed was—'"

"What's a 'betrothed'?"

"A betrothed means the man you're engaged to, Janie."

"Then why don't you say what you mean?"

Properly rebuked and determined not to err again, I recommenced,

"Once upon a time when some other fellows and I were hunting up in Maine —"

"Where's up in Maine?"

"Oh, it's a place way, way up there," I explained, pointing vaguely in the direction of the north, and she nodded sagely.

"It was almost winter time this trip. One morning we started out to climb a big mountain —"

"Oh, I know a mountain where we went once. It had a funny name. The Adrumdacks. Was your mountain bigger than that?"

"Yes, infinitely bigger, you couldn't imagine such a big mountain."

"I could 'magine a mountain so big that it touched the sky," she replied dreamily, looking up into the azure. "Was your mountain as big as that, Unke John?"

"Well, now, I don't believe that it was," I replied dubiously, then added sternly, "If you want me to tell you a story you must not interrupt me all the time."

"'Scuse me," she said so penitently that I had to

give her a forgiving kiss. "But," she continued, "you shouldn't scold your 'gaged."

This sounded reasonable, so I apologized in turn, and went on.

"We walked all day long through a big, dark wood until it was nearly night." She shivered appreciatively. "Suddenly I saw a — a — a wild cat."

"Oooooh."

"I left the rest of the party and began to follow the tracks all alone. At last I noticed that it was getting darker, and DARKER, and DARKER, and looking up through the trees I saw that the sky was all covered over by big black clouds, and pretty soon it began to snow. You can't imagine how it snowed."

"I can 'magine —" she recommenced, but I hurriedly headed her off. "It came down so thick and fast that I couldn't see my hand in front of my face." At this statement she began to experiment, holding her own chubby fist at varying distances from her upturned nose until it was all I could do to hold my laughter in. "The snow piled up on the ground so fast that in a few minutes it was up to my knees." And here she pulled her little skirts up from her bare legs and meditatively regarded her own. Truly I had a most appreciative audience.

"The snow soon obliterated — eh, that is, covered

up the trail, and, to my great horror, I found that I was lost; lost in the dark woods on a high mountain, in an awful snow storm." She cuddled up closer at this terrifying thought, and, wiping the perspiration from my face, I continued:

"I tried to remember where the camp was but after walking for hours and hours I couldn't find it."

"Why didn't you shoot off your gun?" she asked practically.

"Oh, I did, over and over again until all my cartridges were gone, but the snow was so thick the noise couldn't go through it, in fact the bangs all stayed so close around me that they almost made me deaf. Well, at last I was awfully scared and almost ready to cry —"

"I sink I should have cried long ago," she said sympathetically with a little sob at my frightful dilemma, and I had to give her a comforting hug.

"Suddenly, away off through the trees, I saw a little gleam of light. 'Ah, there is the camp at last,' I thought."

"But it wasn't?"

"Oh, no, indeed. It came from a little cabin hidden in the middle of the woods. 'Most dead by this time I stumbled to it, mighty happy, you may be sure, to think that I had found a refuge for the night. I knocked on the door. Nobody answered,

although I could hear people walking about inside and talking."

"P'raps they didn't hear you if they was talking real loud."

"That's what I thought at first, so I began to pound on the door with my gun. Instantly the talking stopped but the door was not opened, so I pounded again, as hard as I could, and shouted too, but my voice was pretty weak by this time, I guess. At last the door was opened just the tiniest crack and a gruff voice said, 'WHAT D'YE WANT?' Just like that, 'WHAT D'YE WANT?'"

"They wasn't very polite, was they?"

"That's just what I thought, so I said, 'Let me in, please'— I was glad I remembered the 'please' —'I'm lost in the woods and almost starved and frozen.'

"I heard more low talking and then the voice said, 'Ye can't come in here,' and somebody tried to shut the door in my face, but I managed to slip my foot into the crack, and so keep it open. They held the door on the inside but using all the last of my strength, I *pushed* it open, and fell sprawling on the floor inside."

"Goody!" she cried, clapping her hands.

"Well, you can't guess what I saw."

"'Twasn't the wildcat, was it?" she hazarded uncertainly.

"No, not the wildcat, but three of the funniest looking women you ever did see. One of them was very old and all bent over and wrinkly, the second I guessed was her daughter, for she was about half as old and as big and strong as a man, and the third was *her* daughter, about as old as Auntie Lee I should say, but, oh, so different. She wasn't nice and sweet and pretty, but very big and ugly and cross. They all wore horrid rough dresses made out of bags, and the room was all bare except for three shelves on the wall where I guess they slept, a board table and three stools. But there was one thing that pleased me to see. It was a big iron pot bubbling away merrily over a little fire in a fireplace.

"They all stood and scowled at me fearfully, and finally the oldest one said in a harsh voice, 'We didn't ask you in, and you can't have any of our supper; besides there's only just enough to go 'round and not another thing to eat in the place.'"

"Oh, the stingy old things, I would have gave you some of mine, Unke John. I sink they was meaner than Auntie Lee."

"I'm sure that you would have shared your porridge — that's what was in the pot — with me, sweetheart. But they were so stingy, and I was so awfully hungry, that I got real angry and said, 'Ladies, I wouldn't ask for any of your supper but

for the fact that I haven't had anything to eat all day, and am simply starving to death.' They just laughed at me, such a sneering sort of laugh that I got madder and madder, and finally walked right over to the pot and said, 'Ladies, if you won't give me any supper, I declare to goodness I'll tip it over and *you* shan't have any, either.'

"You may imagine that this frightened them dreadfully, and after whispering together for a moment the youngest one said, real pleasantly for her, 'Kind sir, if you won't spill our supper, we'll give you a chance to get a share of it, provided you promise to agree to what we say.'

"I couldn't for the life of me guess what she meant, but I was so very hungry that I promised, of course, and she went on, 'We are called the Three Jumping Women. Before every meal we have a jumping match to see which shall have the biggest helping. The one that jumps the farthest gets the most, and so on. Now, if you are willing to jump with us, and manage to beat any one of us, you may have her share.'

"I had never heard of such a funny way of getting a meal, but I had promised, so I said 'all right,' thinking that it ought to be easy to beat women, for I used to be a broad jumper at Harvard with Uncle Bert.

"Then they got ready to jump. First they

moved the table up against the wall, and one of them got out a piece of chalk to mark where each landed, then the old lady said, 'You first, Alpha.' So the youngest of the three stood up side of the fireplace, and gave a jump away out into the middle of the room — about as far as across the piazza, I should think. This was a pretty long jump for a woman to make and it surprised me awfully, but I thought I might be able to beat it. Then the old one said again —'You next, Beta,' and the middle-aged one got ready, and, to my consternation —"

"What's constern —"

"I mean it frightened me, for she jumped nearly a foot farther. This was a mighty long jump for any one, and I was pretty worried and saw my meal vanishing rapidly. She looked sort of pleased over it and said, 'Now it's your turn, Gamma,'— or, perhaps, it was 'Grandma,' I didn't quite catch it.

"The old, old woman hobbled to the wall and crouched down into a little heap, but when she *did* jump, my goodness, she went a-flying through the air clear across the hut — at least as far as the driveway out there. Now I was frightened indeed, for I didn't think that I could possibly jump that far, and I was fearfully hungry, too.

"They all looked at me and laughed again, as much as to say, 'There now, see if you can beat *that*.' This made me ripping mad, for not only

was I hungry enough to eat the jamb off the door, but somehow I've always hated to be beaten in jumping by an old lady. So I took my place and after balancing for a moment gave a tremendous leap." Here I very nearly bounced little Janet out of my lap in my own excitement.

"I went sailing through space across the floor and just as I thought I was going to go bang up against the door, the old woman flung it wide open, and out into the deep snow I went sprawling.

"I was somewhat dazed by my fall and when I recovered enough to pick myself up and turn around, the door was shut tight, and I could hear those terrible women inside the hut, laughing fit to kill themselves."

"And you didn't get any supper?" wailed the little maiden almost in tears.

"Well, as a matter of fact I did," I said, inventing a rather lame postlude to sooth her harrowed feelings on my behalf. "The other fellows who had been hunting for me all day, finally found me just before I starved to death, but they couldn't find any trace of the hut of the Three Jumping Women."

"John Alden Shaw aren't you ashamed to tell such a wild tale to a credulous little maid?" said a laughing voice in the window behind us, and I turned in consternation to face Miss Marion, fairly bursting with merriment.

"For heaven's sake, how long have you been there?" I asked in alarm, thinking back over the first part of our conversation.

"Oh, I arrived at this point of vantage about the middle of your story, I should guess, and couldn't resist the impulse to hear the end of your weird and wonderful adventure. But apparently eavesdroppers sometimes hear more than is good for them, and I'd like to know what on earth Janie meant by saying that the old women were even meaner than I."

"That's our secret," I responded hastily. "We have a great many secrets, you know."

"Yes," broke in Janet, "one of them's that we're 'gaged to be married."

"Now, isn't that lovely? I am sure I congratulate you both."

"Thank you, Auntie Lee. But I only got 'gaged to him after he said you wouldn't have him. I'll give him up, if you want," she added with true Christian generosity.

Miss Lee's face flamed at this naïve suggestion, and she hurried to reply, "Oh, I couldn't think of robbing you, nor being second choice, so you may keep him."

Generally I swore inwardly when any one interrupted our tête-à-têtes, but this time I blessed Bert, as, just at this very opportune moment he came

around the corner and put an end to a most embarrassing situation.

"Come on, John," he cried, "let's have a wee bit round of golf before lunch."

"Can't do it. You seem to forget that the tennis tourney starts day after to-morrow, and I'm going to the Casino and see if I can't get up a practice match with one of the professionals. Goodness knows that I need it."

"Well, I'll make it tennis to oblige you."

"I said that I wanted some *real* practice, young man."

"Squelched," said he with a simulated meekness. "How sharper than a serpent's tooth is man's ingratitude. Get thee gone then, I'm through with you,"— and, with formal adieux, I went.

CHAPTER XV

IN WHICH OF TWO MORE ENGAGEMENTS

SOME people a man may see every day for a year, and at the end of that period feel that he does not really know them. A week or less in the company of others brings the sense of intimate acquaintanceship.

Mr. Hammond was of the latter variety. When I returned to his home that morning and found that he was nowhere about, so sure of my standing there did I feel that I had no hesitancy in requesting the chauffeur to take me over to the Casino, as though I myself were the owner of the car. We went by the way of Thames Street, where I desired to make a small purchase or two.

Strange though it may appear, at least two matters of primary importance had been wholly driven from my mind by the incidents of the morning and the thoughts to which they gave rise, but now the sight of the United States Hotel on one side of the street and the Western Union office on the other, brought them back with a rush.

I stopped at the latter place and upon giving my

name was handed a telegram hot off the wire from Petersburg. It ran, "INSTRUCTIONS RECEIVED I'M ON LETTER FOLLOWS CARE GENERAL DELIVERY NEWPORT."

With a feeling of deep satisfaction and elation I started across the street toward the hotel, and, just as I reached the entrance, ran into the loquacious sleuth emerging therefrom.

He was sober enough this time, the day being still young, but was soon to become soberer still, for, after we had greeted each other formally, I told him as kindly as possible, but a bit triumphantly, that I had, myself, succeeded in locating Mrs. Willard, that therefore his services would be no longer required, and that I intended to write Mr. Willard to that effect immediately.

Despite his former protestations that he was dead sick of his job and extremely anxious to get through with it, he appeared decidedly downcast on hearing that the goose which laid the golden egg was dead — for him — and this fact seemed to trouble him infinitely more than that a mere layman had succeeded where he, the world's greatest detective, had failed.

I had just entered the car again and was democratically shaking hands with Mr. Sherlock, whose red and bibulous countenance was scarcely a thing of beauty, when another motor, driven by Manners,

approached from behind us, slowed up, and I heard his sarcastic voice saying in a low tone, "Ah, I see that you have a wide and varied acquaintance in Newport, Mr. Shaw. Why don't you introduce me to your friend?"

"You might find him a valuable acquisition to your list, Mr. Manners," was my reply. "He's a detective."

Manners muttered something I took to be an oath, and speeded up, and I laughed to myself at having scored this hit.

I then continued to the Casino where, before donning my flannels for my practice, I went up to the writing-room and penned a short and non-committal note to my employer, stating that success had crowned my preliminary efforts, and that, through the patronage of a favoring Goddess of Fortune, I was already on the high-road to Mrs. Willard's confidence.

The balance of the daylight hours brought forth nothing out of the ordinary. I played my practice match, performing therein with a discouraging erraticalness, dressed, and dined in solitary state at Bergers', where the music by the Hungarian orchestra soothed my injured feelings a little, returned to the Casino, tried to read the latest magazines, failed, loafed about a bit and renewed a few old acquaintances with several of the contestants

in the coming tourney, who, like me, had arrived a little early, and arranged and played a second practice match, this time against a Southerner who had not been on turf that season and so was a shade worse than I, which encouraged me materially.

All this time I was having to exert my strongest will power to counteract the attractive force which was constantly pulling me toward the Aldriches', but I was determined to keep away until the morrow at least, lest I wear out my welcome.

At six I returned home and partook of an early and quiet dinner with my host, who had to leave immediately after it for a function to which I had not been bidden, and, left alone, I went out of doors and strolled about, aimlessly smoking countless cigarettes to while away the time.

There, in the gathering twilight, the demon of utter loneliness seized hold upon me. For the first time I realized that I was wholly dissatisfied with my lot in life, that my existence, which I had always thitherto regarded as so " full of a number of things," as Mr. Thomas had put it, was weary, stale, flat and unprofitable, an aching void, a desert of dreariness, empty of everything which made the living worth the while. There is no getting away from it, a man in love is a sad contradiction, now raised to the heights, now cast down to the lowest depths.

For a while I brooded moodily over the cursed inequalities of this world. Why, since I was neither rich nor in the possession of any expectations of ever becoming so, had Fate mocked me by decreeing that my first real passion should have as its object one of such exalted estate, so lovely, and wealthy?

Plunged into the depths of such gloomy thoughts as these, I walked out into the road and on and on, wholly unconscious of direction, until suddenly I found myself turning into the driveway at the Aldriches'. This brought me back to earth with a start, the phrase from Shelley's "Lines to an Indian Air," springing unbidden to my mind, "And a spirit in my feet, has led me, who knows how? to thy chamber window sweet."

"Since you have come so far," whispered a tempting voice inside, "you might as well go on." My resistance to this plea was merely nominal, and, after a very brief struggle, I went.

I found Ethel alone on the veranda, and she welcomed me with a natural simplicity and frank friendliness which went a long way toward indicating that the fears which had formed a basis for my decision to stay away were merely creatures of my own imagination. Nevertheless I felt constrained to justify my presence there so soon again — to myself, at least — by saying apologetically,

"I had to run over for a moment to say 'good-night' to my little sweetheart. I suppose you have been told that Janet and I are 'gaged now."

"Yes, I've heard the wonderful news, and, of course, I'm delighted, John — I may call you John now, may I not? As your future mother-in-law I ought to kiss you, but as it's still light and such an act might give rise to gossip, I'll postpone that pleasure. Be good to my little girl, won't you?"

"You bet I will — excuse me — Janet told me this morning that you don't approve of the expression 'you bet.'"

"Quite right. You see, that as a member of my family you will have to mind your 'P's and Q's.' But if you really want to say good night to Janie come on up with me. I'm just going to tuck her into bed."

I gladly went with her to the little blue and white bedroom where my 'gaged slept, but scarcely had we reached it when a maid appeared announcing that Mr. and Mrs. Huntington had called to confer with Mrs. Gary about some charity, and that they could stay only a moment.

"Oh, pshaw, John, it seems as though something was always calling me away from this, the greatest pleasure of my whole day. You may as well get broken in as a family man. Stay and hear

Janet's prayers and get her to bed if I don't get back before, will you?"

I assented with some embarrassment, but my little sweetheart showed none, and was instantly kneeling by my side, her little pink feet protruding from her snowy nightie, saying her "Now I lay me."

A big lump rose in my throat. This loving, confiding child at my knee brought back more poignantly than ever all the sense of utter lonesomeness that I had been experiencing, and as I gently caressed her golden curls while she babbled the homely prayer, the thought burst upon me that I wanted even more than the love and comradeship of a wife; I wanted children.

I gave little Janet a good-night kiss, her soft, warm arms hugging my neck tightly, and she was in the fairyland of dreams before I had finished tucking the sheet about her.

In spite of my loneliness I somehow felt that I wanted to be left to myself and so sneaked quietly downstairs and was just passing through the big hallway when Bert caught sight of me from the music-room.

"Who goes there, friend or foe?" he shouted, covering me with an imaginary revolver in the shape of his forefinger.

"Friend," I answered.

"Advance, friend, and give the countersign."

"Sweet spirits of nitre," was my reply, the first absurdity that popped into my head.

"Right! Sit down, friend; take a weight off your feet and smoke a pipe of peace."

"Can't do it, old man," I responded, sinking into a chair and accepting the cigar which he held out. "Got to go right along."

"So I see. And now, having settled that point, give an account of yourself to-day. Why haven't you shown up? My women-folk have been crying their eyes out over your neglect."

"Fine chance! Do you suppose I want to camp here until you all regard me as a pest?"

"You needn't begin to worry over that happening yet," broke in Miss Marion.

"And even if you do become one, I'm certain sure Marion would be glad to add you to her collection. I understand that she owns the finest collection of assorted pests extant," added Bert.

"You ought to know, dear," she replied sweetly, "since you're the charter member of that organization."

"Help! I should think that by this time I would have sense enough not to leave an opening like that. Now you've simply got to stay and lend me your moral support, surrounded as I am on all sides by the enemy, and as Mr. Kipling so well said,

'The female of the species is more deadly than the male,' as you'll learn if you live long enough. Come on, make a day of it — I don't mean a day of twenty-four hours, of course," he added hastily, "even my liberal nature could not countenance your staying until four A. M. to-morrow."

"I'll accept on just one condition, that you all come with me to Freebody Park as my guests this evening."

"Agreed for the crowd," was his reply. "I'll telephone down for seats. What do you want? Peanut gallery?"

"Of course, but if you can't get those, compromise on a box. And at the same time order a taxi, won't you?"

"Yes, I won't. I guess that we can provide the means of conveyance, with a stable full of motor cars simply eating their heads off."

"Don't you think that you could go, dear? It would do you good," Marion asked of her sister.

"No, I think I had better not. Bed is the best place for little folks like me." I joined my request to Marion's, but Margaret was not to be persuaded. Mr. and Mrs. Aldrich also refused on the ground that they were getting too old for such frivolities, and Bert departed to return in a moment with word that the car would be around for us in half an hour.

He continued, "Just to prove that I, at least, am not yet weary of your company I'll swallow my pride and renew my invitation for a game of golf or tennis to-morrow morning. Being Sunday, and my fond parents still imbued with antiquated ideas concerning its observance, such wicked relaxations as theaters, cards and dancing are tabooed here, and we have to content ourselves with such harmless recreations as tennis, golf, motoring, riding and the like."

"And I invite you to go to church with us," said Miss Margaret.

"And I accept the latter invitation, being somewhat old-fashioned myself," I responded promptly.

"Thwarted again. What's the use of a mere man trying to butt up against the eternal feminine. But fie upon you, John, I'm surprised that an atheist like you should abnegate his principles merely to be in company with lovely women."

"An atheist? What are you trying to do, ruin my reputation?"

"Well, agnostic then. If my memory serves me, it was you who pretty nearly broke up the class in philosophy once by a wholly uncalled for dissertation on the subject of religion."

"Do you mean to tell us, Bert, that there is really a man alive not afraid to speak his mind on the one most important subject in the world?"

"He stands — or rather, sits — before you in flesh and blood. Look at him well, ladies. You may never see his like again."

"What have you got to say in answer to this serious charge?" said Ethel, sternly.

"Guilty! I may be unique, but although I have never flaunted my ideas in public, in spite of Bert's remark, I admit that it has always seemed peculiar to me somehow that the average normal young person, either man or woman, never mentions the name of their God outside of church — except in profanity, of course — without giving the impression that he — or she — is fearfully embarrassed and ought to apologize for the slip."

"That's a sad truth, Mr. Shaw," interposed mild little Mrs. Aldrich. "This is a terribly frivolous age, and I don't know what we are coming to."

"I think that we are coming to a very great change for the better, Mrs. Aldrich. I don't pretend to be a prophet or anything like that and I may be wrong, but serious thinkers — don't laugh, Bert, I'm not classing myself with them — seem to agree that we are just beginning to feel the ground swell which is the forecourser of a mighty tidal wave of awakened individual, and social conscience, internationalism and real religious feeling. I don't mean that we can look for the millennium next week or next year, but better things are coming. The

present materialistic order may die hard and probably will, but its death throes will be the birth pains of a new and better era."

"Yes, it certainly looks very much that way now," answered Bert sarcastically. "Europe an armed camp, the nations itching for an excuse to fly at each others' throats, America ditto with capital and labor in a death grapple, sensualism and worldliness rampant, and the whole shooting match going to the tarnation bow-wows."

"You've described the attitude of the perpetual pessimist to a T, but I know and you know that you don't believe it yourself. Didn't you ever hear the saying 'darkest just before dawn'?"

"Yours is a comforting doctrine, anyway," put in Marion.

"Yes, it is the belief of an optimist, but don't give me credit for it."

"But why should Bert have said that you were an agnostic, Mr. Shaw?" persisted Mrs. Aldrich.

"Oh, he was joking; he didn't mean it, Mrs. Aldrich, except perhaps in the literal sense of 'one who admits that he doesn't know.' In that sense even a true believer in religion may be an agnostic, I suppose."

"Well, anyway, you know that you did knock the accepted principles of religious belief, old man, al-

though I can't remember just what it was all about now," he said in self-defense.

"That is evident, or you wouldn't say that 'I knocked' any religious principles. I didn't, never have, never shall. As I recall, I said that I couldn't ascribe to many of the accepted ideas and beliefs incidental to our religion as it is generally preached and believed, and Professor James made me elucidate, to my great dismay."

"All right, then I'll hedge once more and get it right at last by explaining that you 'merely knocked the accepted ideas and beliefs incidental to our religion as it is commonly preached and believed.' Dost that suit your highness?"

"No! To be entirely right, my boy, you've got to go a step further still. I didn't knock at all; I merely said that I personally could not agree with and ascribe to them."

"You arouse my interest and curiosity, Mr. Shaw," said my host. "Would you object to going a little further yourself and explaining what you mean?"

"Yes, please do, Mr. Shaw," Miss Margaret added her word of entreaty. "It will at least be refreshing to hear a young man talk on some subject other than shop, sport or sentimentality, which, with gossip, seem to be the only topics of conversation indulged in nowadays."

"Good Lord, I've put my foot in it again, and as usual!" groaned Bert. "John is the direct descendant of one of those ranting Puritans — that noble army of martyrs who came over in the *Mayflower* to this hitherto happy country, to worship God in their own way, and make everybody else worship him in their way, too. If he ever gets started sermonizing, good night vaudeville show."

"Don't be too concerned, Bert," I replied, beginning to feel as much embarrassment as any one of the general public against which I had been inveighing. "I had no desire to air my views, nor to preach what I try to practice. I hope that my interrogators will let me off on saying that I don't profess to be a saint myself, I hate the kind of hypocrisy which passes so often for religion, and that I believe that a man's religion, if it means anything to him, should not be carefully hidden under a bushel six days in the week and taken out, dusted and set on a candlestick for an hour or two on the seventh. One's immortal soul, it seems to me, is in one respect precisely like one of his muscles. Give it proper and consistent exercise and it will expand and grow stronger, but ignore its existence and it will shrivel to flabby uselessness."

"Very true, but you are not going to escape that easy, John," broke in Ethel. "As your mother-in-law-to-be I think that I have a right to sit as a

national board of censors upon all your theories. I don't want any Bob Ingersoll marrying my daughter, so begin at once."

"Oh, come now, you're not in earnest," I said, squeaming inwardly. The response was heartily affirmative, and, at last, with considerable hesitation, I said, "Well, supposing you ask me some questions and I'll do my best to explain just where I cannot follow all the generally accepted beliefs called by the name of religion."

"Very well, then, I'll start the ball a-rolling," began Bert cheerfully. "Do you believe that Jonah swallowed the whale?"

"Albert, you were not brought up to treat serious subjects like religion with levity," reprimanded his mother. "Do you, Mr. Shaw —"

Her question was interrupted by a vigorous honking from the direction of the driveway without, and Bert sprang to his feet, laughingly patting his mother's cheek and crying, "My lord and ladies, the auto waits and so can John's dissertation, but a vaudeville show — like time and tide — waits for no man. Come along."

With an inward relief as great as his own I rose.

Mrs. Aldrich sighed softly, saying, "I suppose that we'll have to excuse you, but this incident is wonderfully typical of the attitude of this whole age. A show inevitably takes precedence over what

should be the most serious and important thing in our lives."

And I could not but agree in my heart that she was right.

CHAPTER XVI

IN WHICH PRIDE GOETH BEFORE A FALL

It may have been merely the natural exuberance of spirits of four fun-loving young people on pleasure bent, or, perhaps, the reaction from the unusual seriousness of our recent conversation, but from whatsoever cause, our visit to Freebody Park was attended with wild hilarity.

The show itself, as I remember it, was of a decidedly mediocre variety, but we needed no help from the other side of the footlights to keep us in a perpetual state of giggles and merriment. Bert was a whole show in himself, and his running stream of side remarks at the labored efforts of the paid performers were so provocative of mirth that we must have been public nuisances — or would have but for the fact that the occupants of the boxes at the Park seldom pay any serious attention to what is passing on the stage, anyway. Many of our neighbors knew Ethel and Bert intimately and sent glances and even words of tolerant amusement in our direction, apparently ascribing our behavior to an over-generous indulgence in cocktails at dinner.

Marion alone tried occasionally — and futilely — to stem the tide of our boisterous gayety, and finally said in despair, "Bert Aldrich, beware how you give way to this inordinate worldly gayety, or your immortal soul will surely shrivel."

"Let it shriv, then. I've simply got to do something to offset the sobering effect of John's recent lecture, or I'll find myself running away and joining a convent —"

"You mean monastery, don't you?"

"I, a monastery? Not on your life. I meant just what I said, and just think what a heart-breaking loss that would be to the Great White Way, and how many choreens would starve to death with their steady meal ticket gone. Besides, why pick on me? John's last jest was infinitely worse than any I've perpetrated to date, although I've almost thought of one which will simply make you *scream.*"

How changed circumstances affect one's point of view! Many a time I had sat behind the barrier which separates the favored boxholders from the common herd in the stalls, and inwardly cursed the society folk whose constant chatter detracted so much from the enjoyment of the show. Yet now, without a thought for others, I was myself acting in precisely the manner that had once so disgusted me.

Thus time passed on wings until the big act on

the bill, a widely advertised dancer, was next in order. When the placards bearing her name were placed on the two easels at either side of the stage, we calmed down a little, prepared to give more attention to the performance of this apparently famous terpsichorean expert.

Her first number was commonplace and harmless enough, but thereafter followed a series of bodily contortions, performed in a most abbreviated costume, which, by no stretch of the imagination, could be called graceful, pleasing, or even dancing.

I won't pretend to say whether I should or should not have been amused by it had I been alone, or with men only, but, in the company as it was constituted, the exhibition was a torture to me, and alternate hot and cold waves of shame and embarrassment passed over me. We all of us felt, apparently, that to leave would have been too pointed, for no one made a move in that direction, but I rejoiced to see, by a covert glance, that Marion would not even look at the performer but had turned away from the stage and was reading her program earnestly.

When the dance — if dance it could be called — was over I breathed a sigh of relief, but I was decidedly premature, for the star, having thrown a cloak about her, began to throw broadcast into the audience mementoes of her act in the shape of those

articles accessory to wearing apparel made famous by the British order whose motto is, "*Honi soit qui mal y pense.*"

Many of the men spectators displayed their proficiency as ball players and so obtained one of her favors, until she had only one left to throw, and this came sailing straight into our box.

Bert intercepted it, and upon examination discovered a card attached thereto on which was written, "Dear Johnny. I seen and recognized you before the act. If you can shake your lady friend after the show, come around to No. — Beach Street and we'll have a cozy little bird and bottle like we used to."

This broke the tension a little and we all began to jolly Bert in the most approved fashion over his latest conquest, he, himself, entering into the fun at his expense with ardor, but, after a moment, turned the card over and exclaimed in astonishment, "Here, this *billet doux* wasn't meant for me at all, but for you, John!" and he read aloud, "Mr. John Alden Shaw."

We burst into renewed laughter at this attempt to put the joke on me, but he added seriously, "I'm not jesting. Here, see for yourselves, if you don't believe me," and he handed the souvenir over to Ethel.

I could not credit my eyesight, for the card did

in fact bear the words which he had read. There was a moment of strained silence. Then I said with a forced laugh, "Well, this is one on me, all right. I guess that the lady must be a clairvoyant as well as some other things. I'm sure I never set eyes on her before. It's safe to say that once would have been enough — or too much."

"Oh, come now," replied Bert, anxious to get back at me for his recent unmerciful grueling. "That's a likely story, and I'm surprised and grieved that you would deny an old friend like this. There is a chapter in John's life that I wot not of apparently. Take me with you when you accept her invitation, won't you? Of course, you're going yourself?"

"Don't talk tommy rot," I replied with unnecessary heat. "And cut out the insinuations. I know that you're only joking, but the idea of ever having had a bird and bottle with that, bah! How in the dickens did she learn my name? Oh, come on, let's get out of here," and so stirred up was I that, without waiting for the others to agree, I jumped up and led the way from the theater, hardly knowing whether to try to treat the matter as a joke or give way to the real anger which I felt over it. One thing was certain, I was thoroughly disturbed over the thought of what impression this unpleasant and inexplicable incident had left on the minds

of these two refined and sensitive girls — especially Marion's.

Nor was I to be kept long in doubt. During the ride home Ethel and Bert talked to me continually in a light vein of anything and everything, but Miss Lee hardly addressed me, and indeed spoke scarcely at all, and my misery grew until I felt that I could return and assassinate the cause of my disgrace with the greatest pleasure.

Moreover, I puzzled my brain over and over again without arriving at any reasonable or unreasonable explanation of the affair, and when Miss Marion said, "Good night, Mr. Shaw," in a very cold and formal tone, and without offering me her hand, I blurted out in despair, "For Heaven's sake, Miss Lee, surely you don't believe —"

"I don't know what to believe, Mr. Shaw," and with this far from comforting remark she left me.

I walked home, utterly at sea to find any explanation for this singular occurrence, and torn between bitterness and distress, now angry over Miss Lee's unjust attitude, and now saying to myself that she could not possibly be blamed, she knew nothing about me and the circumstantial evidence against me was most certainly strong and convincing.

The next hour was the bitterest I had ever spent, and made no less so by the fact that I was wholly innocent. I saw all my beautiful air castles crum-

bling into dry dust, and any resentment that I had theretofore felt against Fate, shrunk into insignificance beside that which now possessed me. After tossing and turning for an hour I fell into a disturbed sleep, only to wake the following morning with the troubled consciousness that there was something rotten in the State of Denmark. For an instant I could not collect my thoughts. Then the sickening realization of the night before came over me with a rush, and the thoughts with which I had fallen asleep returned magnified and sinister despite the broad and cheerful sunshine that was flooding the room.

I dressed dejectedly and went down to breakfast. This time Mr. Hammond was ahead of me, and, as I entered, greeted my arrival with a shout of laughter.

"What's the joke now?" I asked with little enthusiasm.

"I guess from your disconsolate countenance that you have seen the morning paper, but if not, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest this," and he handed me the *New York Sun* opened to a sporting page, and indicated a column article headed, "Entry List and Drawings for the National Championship."

I skipped the lead, and my eyes ran rapidly down the list of names. It is remarkable how one's own

cognomen sticks out from a printed list like a sore thumb and I found mine almost immediately and read, J. A. Shaw vs. winner W. B. Brownley — E. F. Manners match."

The thought immediately flashed through my brain, "That brings me against Manners in the second round as sure as shooting, for he is bound to win his first match, and slim chance I've got of winning from him — which means my exit right at the outset." Truly, calamities seldom come singly, and it never rains but it pours.

"I can imagine what Manners will do to *you*," laughed my host. "Have you seen last week's *Town Topics* yet?"

"No," I replied, wondering what new unpleasant disclosure was in store for me.

He sent a maid for it, and pointed out an item which read as follows: "All Newport is chuckling over an incident which happened on Thursday night at the residence of one of its leading, if not most popular, bachelors, who is both a former tennis star of National reputation but known as a most successful promoter, and all-'round sportsman. He was host at a friendly game of auction which followed a select stag dinner, one of the guests — invited, 'tis rumored, merely because staying with a neighbor who was really wanted — being a young Bostonian blessed with a name made famous in

history. The host and unwelcome guest found themselves pitted against one another in play, which, it is said, was for comfortably high stakes, and the latter rose to depart at midnight when slightly ahead of the game. This led to an accusation of poor sportsmanship by his entertainer, the implication was hotly denied, and the accused offered to play one more hand to settle the score and the possession of the stakes for the evening, the cards having already been dealt. This was agreed to and played amid heavy betting on both sides, and the interloper won from his famous opponent — who considered himself some expert — to the tune of something like a thousand dollars, which loss hurt considerably more than the mere defeat, it is whispered. Moral: Beware of the unsophisticated youths from Beantown."

I read it through twice, and then whistled saying, "Do you suppose that he has seen this?"

"Seen it? Of course he's seen it. Why, *Town Topics* is the Newporter's Bible. He must be thinking that you were invented for the particular purpose of plaguing him, and love you correspondingly."

"I should say as much."

"And I'll bet he looks on this tennis meeting as arranged by a special providence to give him a chance to take it out of your hide. You'd better

default and dodge the licking as gracefully as possible."

"Default?" I said wrathfully. "Well, hardly. I can take a defeat, if necessary, but give him the satisfaction of thinking that I am afraid of him? I guess not!"

"That's the way to talk, and I expected as much from you. I'm going to make a burnt sacrifice to the Weatherman to-day in hope that he'll send the hottest day of the year to-morrow. Manners is so pickled in alcohol now that he could not possibly last through a long match if the thermometer were flirting with the hundred mark. But, cheer up. I thought that you were having altogether too smooth sailing of late and about due for some bumps."

"Much obliged; you are a fine Job's comforter. As a matter of fact, I am getting them — in bunches," and I proceeded to give him an account of the peculiar affair of the previous evening.

"Whew! That *is* a fine state of affairs, and I don't wonder that you're sore. But why don't you hunt up your dancer friend this morning and choke the source of her information from her?"

"I'd like to, fast enough, but if I should go to see her it would be just my luck to have the Lees go riding by at the psychological moment when I was leaving her, and have her throw her arms around my neck and kiss me good-by."

Mr. Hammond burst into a roar of laughter at this picture, and I glared at him, my sense of humor being in total eclipse at that moment.

"Besides," I added, when he stopped, "I happen to have another engagement this morning."

"Well, I'll be hanged if I don't do it myself then. It would be a rare lark. I tell you what, I'll go in the guise of your lawyer and threaten her with everything I can think of from a suit for arson to manslaughter. Oh, I'll get the truth out of her all right, if I have to operate with a bowie knife."

"Do you really mean it?" I asked eagerly.

"Sure as you are an inch high, my boy, and I will have the time of my life doing it."

"Mr. Hammond, you're a brick!" said I, jumping up and wringing his hand. "Now I'm off to keep my appointment."

"Now you're nothing of the sort. The Lord deliver me from ever falling in love again! Oh, I can see through a wall when there is a hole in it. Sit down, man, you haven't had breakfast yet."

Considerably abashed I obeyed, but a half hour later was approaching the Aldrich mansion with a comparatively light heart, confident that all my troubles were soon to blow over.

Bert met me at the door with a long face. "Prepare for the worst," he said dolefully; "you are in deep disgrace, young man."

"Go ahead and get it over with," I responded with sinking heart.

"Margaret really isn't so well and doesn't feel like going to church this morning, and Marion pleads a headache and begs to be excused. I think that she has gone for a walk to get the air, or, more likely, to escape from the persecutions of a certain very depraved young man I know of. So you see there's nothing left for you to do but stay and play tennis with me."

With the milk of human kindness thoroughly soured within me I refused curtly, and said that I was going to church anyway.

"Well, you are the limit!" he said, in deep disgust. "You're about as stubborn as a mule — I was going to say 'had about as much sense as one,' but I wouldn't insult the mule that much."

"Thanks. Good-by."

"See you this afternoon?"

"Not if I know it," and with the absurd arrogance and hot-headedness of youth, I rode away on my high horse, utterly forgetful of the obvious fact that I had no quarrel with Bert.

Moreover, I did go to church, but found no comfort nor consolation there. I read the prayers with all my thoughts racing madly over the recent unhappy experiences, heard the sermon without taking in a word of it, and picked flaws in the singing,

which I doubt not was excellent, the choir being a very good one.

Even the walk home through the beautiful countryside helped little, and when I reached Mr. Hammond's, he added to my affliction by reporting that he had sought the dancer, but found that the bird had flown to her next stand less than an hour before.

That afternoon and evening I enjoyed being thoroughly miserable, and this time my misery loved company and I stuck to my host like a leech. Indeed, my society must have been anything but edifying, but he bore with me with unfailing good humor, thus proving himself more and more my friend, and, verily, a man in a thousand.

CHAPTER XVII

IN WHICH SOME SPORTING HISTORY IS RETOLD

When I arose the next morning I began to believe in the efficacy of prayer over material things, for the opening day of the big national tourney dawned fair and exceedingly hot. By ten o'clock, when play was scheduled to commence, it was sizzling. By noon the sultry atmosphere was fairly vibrating with heat waves which seemed to come from an inferno.

I was on deck at the Casino early, and the bustle and excitement of preparation proved sufficiently infectious to cheer me up considerably, and I began to greet with real enthusiasm, old friends among the new arrivals as they flocked in, bag and baggage. After all, I thought at last, the play *is* the thing, and what profiteth it for a husky, vigorous young man to go about moping and eating his heart out over a fickle girl?

The Little Doctor, then president of the National Association, I found enthroned upon a folding chair on the veranda to the locker building, surrounded by his aides-de-camp, welcoming contestants, check-

ing up their names, assigning lockers and scheduling courts, as busy as a bee, and, indeed, the general hum and buzz carried out the simile. I reported to him, and then stood for a moment looking down the stretch of turf upon which several pairs were already hard at it, watched by an ever swelling gallery who would line the main path until the hour for the featured match struck, when a great rush for the grand stand would occur.

How much a modern tennis tourney resembled, while differing from, a meeting of the olden days, I mused.

Here, as then, were the grassy lists, the eager warriors keen to gain the honor of challenging the mighty champion for his crown and honors, the gallery filled with fair women, many of whom, doubtless, had a hero entered for the fray with courage doubled by a smile from their dear lips. Ah, that I might be so encouraged! The proud steeds arching their noble necks and champing fiercely at their bits, each bearing his mail-clad, behelmeted warrior, were no more, to be sure. Their martial aspect had given place to the more peaceful, but scarcely less attractive, scene made by the lithe and graceful contenders all clad in spotless white, and bearing, instead of warlike spear or sword, the light and perfect racket — a weapon requiring far greater skill of hand and brain to manage. The fan fare

of trumpets did not echo down the field, but the merry fiddle was tuning up in the pavilion at the other end of the stretch of courts. The game had truly changed, but the old spirit still lived.

Since I did not have to play until the second round I volunteered my services as an official, an offer which was gratefully taken up, and I was assigned to the post of base line umpire for the "big" match of the first round — the meeting of two "first ten" players, which was to be staged at eleven upon the so-called Championship Court, and the prescribed hour found me at my post facing the grandstand where the favored Crœsuses viewed the play shaded by the row of tall trees behind it. Now it was being rapidly filled with gayly attired society women and their more somberly arrayed male escorts.

The match was started promptly, and from the first service proved to be as hard fought and thrilling a battle as one could wish to see, replete with brilliant shots calling for close decisions, and, for a time, my mind was wholly engrossed with my duties and the play. But the extreme heat and the continued tension finally caused a reaction. I found my thoughts and eyes wandering, and at last, forgetful of my task for the moment, I looked aimlessly toward the grandstand just in time to see Ethel, Bert, and last but not least — Marion — en-

ter three of the seats directly opposite me. I straightway forgot all else save the presence of my enchantress, but the next instant was brought to earth by hearing the voice of the veteran referee call, "How was it, Mr. Shaw?"

I had been asleep at my post, and, during that fatal moment, a deep drive had struck so close to my base line that the scorer was in doubt whether it had landed good or out. And, horrors, I realized instinctively at the same moment that if the shot were good it meant the end of the match, for the score then stood forty-fifteen and five games to three in the third set.

In desperation I called, "Out," hoping against hope that some beneficent fate would come to my rescue and decree that my guess were right, but the protesting chorus of "In," from spectators behind me, immediately confirmed my worst fears, and the man on the service line looked at me in deep surprise.

"Forty-thirty," sang the referee, and although the player on the other side of the net gave me a reproachful glance, he went back and prepared to serve again without a word, for in this sport of gentlemen it is the unwritten rule that there shall be no protesting of decisions, however flagrantly wrong they may be.

I would have rejoiced to have had the earth open

and swallow me up then and there, and the fact that the gainer by my erroneous decision deliberately and plainly "threw" the next point and the match, as a true sportsman would, did not help matters any, as far as I was concerned.

Feeling everlastingly disgraced, I left hurriedly and made for the locker building to waylay the winner and apologize, but as I was about to enter the door, the Little Doctor hailed me with the far from comforting information that I was wanted immediately to play Manners, whose first opponent had found discretion the better part of valor and defaulted to him.

I went to my locker and dressed, outwardly calm, but within as nervous as a witch, and upon reporting to the "powers that be" was informed that we had been assigned to the "second best" court, that directly in front of the building. "You two ought to be a pretty good attraction," was the cold-blooded remark, but I knew at heart that Manners, and not I, was meant.

My opponent, after the detestable custom of a few stars, kept me waiting fully ten minutes, which did not tend to lessen my nervousness any, and by the time he did appear, looking big and business-like, I was pretty nearly in a blue funk.

We took our places and proceeded to "warm up" — foolish term on such a day — Manners from the

outset driving the ball across with an enviable freedom of stroke, speed and accuracy and smashing with deadly precision, while I could scarcely get it in the court at all.

After a few rallies he took his position at the base line, saying shortly, "Let's start; I'm ready," without even adding the customary, "Whenever you are," and although I might have demanded the privilege of further practice, my pride forbade and I prepared to receive, saying, "All right; I guess I'll never be any worse than I am now."

Manners was a left-handed player, and his twisting American service came to me with an awkward bounce which completely disrupted my returns, his drives were as true and speedy as rifle bullets, and his volleying — for he rushed to the net at every occasion — quick as lightning. Try as I would — drive, chop, or lob — nothing went right and I became bemired in a slough of execrable errors, all the time having the discomforting feeling that the gallery was either amused — or worse, sympathetic — which did not tend to improve my playing any.

Others may have found the day delightful. Certainly the sun was shining, the surroundings charmed the eye, and a splendid orchestra was discoursing sweet strains nearby, but none of these things pleased me, for I was getting unmercifully

beaten. The first fifteen games were waking nightmares. With monotonous regularity the umpire called off one after the other, until the score stood two sets to love in my rival's favor, three games having been the best I could do against his almost machine-like playing.

With this comfortable lead, Manners — smiling sarcastically — eased up a bit and obviously decided that he could toy with me and save himself. But at the same time I thought that I detected in his movements some signs of physical distress, for, in spite of the terrific heat, he had been forcing the pace continually and was perspiring profusely, requiring frequent recourse to the towel as well as the pitcher of ice water.

This combination lent me new heart and with my returned courage came a remarkable return to form. Steadily I felt my control improving and my confidence growing in the same ratio, until I was soon playing nearly up to my capabilities and meeting his softer shots with clean, hard strokes.

As was inevitable, his let-down was fatal to my opponent. He simply found it impossible to get started again against my materially improved playing, and finally threw the set away at 6–3, evidently preferring to let it go without the tremendous effort it would require to pull it out of the fire, and to fin-

ish off the job by taking the fourth set after the rest which the seven-minute intermission would give him.

It seemed to me that he walked a trifle unsteadily to the dressing room, whereas I was beginning to feel stronger than ever, and as I came out of the shower room and passed his compartment, I saw him drinking a highball, a sight which encouraged me still more. If he needed stimulant he must be further gone than I had imagined.

When I reached my own locker, Ned Witherbee, whom I had not laid eyes on since the day he introduced me to my rival, was waiting for me, and as he helped me into dry flannels he sputtered away like a roman candle.

"It's an outrage, John! That — that — that snake is simply cheating you out of the match! Upon my soul, I never saw such outrageously flagrant footfaulting! He's stealing a clean yard on you every time he serves. No wonder that he can get to the net and smother your returns. Why the dickens don't you put up a kick?"

"I imagined that he was doing it, Ned, and that, with his infernal service, has knocked my game galley west. But what can I do? I would look fine, wouldn't I, calling for a footfault judge to watch a man of his tennis standing just because I was getting whipped. I'm no cry-baby."

"No, of course you can't do anything, but I'll be damned if I can't," and he rushed off in high dudgeon.

I was ready to resume well within the time limit, but no Manners appeared, and, after waiting several minutes, one of the executive committee went to hunt him up, swearing to chalk up a default against him if he didn't come out immediately.

As I walked to the railing I saw an extra chair at each base line and seated in one of them the champion himself, a man death on footfaulting and having not only a clear eye and judgment, but the courage of his convictions.

As I was standing there, inwardly elated, I felt an arm over my shoulders and found Mr. Hammond at my side, "No more footfaulting, I guess, John," said he. "Manners will go clean up in the air when he sees Bill on the job, for they love each other like a couple of cats, tails tied together and hung over a clothesline. I haven't seen Manners play like this in years but I told you to expect as much. You've got him going at last just the same."

"Yes, it is beginning really to look like it," I responded, glowing with gratitude at his words of encouragement. "But I haven't got his strokes, confound him."

"Did you ever hear how Beals Wright beat the

mighty Brookes in Australia a while ago, on a day just like this?"

"Yes," I replied with a flash of inspiration.

"Well, a word to the wise, you know. Go thou and do likewise."

At this moment Manners put in an appearance and we went out into the broiling sun again.

As I stopped at the referee's high chair to pick up my racket my eye chanced to go up to the balcony of the locker building, and there, in the very front row, stood Marion.

Scarcely could I credit my senses, for as I looked her eye caught mine, she smiled and waved her program encouragingly, and I went to my place with the cold determination to win that match or die in the attempt.

Manners annexed the first game, and then served and ran in to the net as usual, bent on finishing me off as soon as possible. I waited patiently and then lobbed the ball deep. This change of tactics took him off his guard, the ball cleared his racket cleanly and forced him to turn and race to the back line for it at full speed. It was the opening shot in my campaign of tossing every ball well in the air whenever he elected to run in, and merely patting it over when he hugged the back court. Even the simplest bounces which I knew that I could stroke hard for aces, met the same reception at my hands.

What with the repeated calling of faults by the new umpire when he overstepped the line in serving, and my own baiting, Manners lost his head completely. Against any other opponent his knowledge of tactics would undoubtedly have saved him, but in this instance personal venom entered and robbed him of his capacity to think. Utterly disregarding the lessons that his long tournament experience should have taught him, he began to try to win every point outright, and rushed around like one possessed. On such a day the result was inevitable.

Slowly his strokes lost their sting and became uncertain, his feet began to lag. Before that set was over he had called for spirits of ammonia, and when I had won it at 6-2 and was on even terms again, I felt that the time had come when I could meet and beat him at his own game.

With a masterfulness I had never felt before, I, in turn, assumed the offensive and with clean telling drives and volleys ran out the games until five stood on my side of the ledger and none on his. Then came a final burst of speed from him to prevent a love set, but it was only a flash in the pan, and I was trotting off the court with a joy of conquest such as I had never known, filling and thrilling me.

Nor was this all. When I emerged from my

shower bath one of the red-jerseyed ball boy imps handed me a note, hurriedly written in pencil on half of a score card. I read it with soaring spirits, for it ran,

"Hearty congratulations on your famous victory. Sorry that I cannot wait and offer them in person, but we are off in a few minutes for a yachting trip which is to last until to-morrow night. Am sure Margaret would be glad to see you in the meantime if you have time to call upon her.

"Sincerely,
"M.

"P. S. Saturday night's episode all explained and you are vindicated."

With this wonderful postscript — and how like a woman it was — filling my thoughts and carrying my spirit into the heights again, I dressed and went out into the bright sunshine — infinitely more glorious than when I had left it — to receive the congratulations of many friends and acquaintances. Ned Witherbee had already begun to celebrate my victory at the refreshment counter, and by the time that he sighted me and had almost carried me bodily to his base of supplies, there to regale myself with an inoffensive ginger ale, he had arrived at a point where he took most of the credit for Manners' defeat to himself — and I will not say that he was wrong.

He further insisted that I be his guest at luncheon, and I very nearly turned him from an ardent friend into a bitter enemy by steadily refusing the rich viands and potent liquid refreshments with which he persisted in plying me.

Not until the middle of the afternoon did I begin to realize how much that hard five set match at noontide had taken out of me, and then I sought out Mr. Hammond and got him to take me home. At my request we went via the Postoffice, where I found the expected letter from Jack Borroughs in Petersburg. We read it together, after I had first taken him fully into my confidence as to all the steps which I had taken on behalf of the Lees' Virginia property, explaining my action by telling him that I was associated with Willard's lawyers, but asking him not to divulge this fact.

It ran:—

"PETERSBURG, VA.
"August —, ——.

"Dear John:

"I'd rather have your luck than a million dollars. There you are, leading a gay sporting life in Newport, mingling freely with the disgustingly rich, and simply tumbling onto big cases, while here I am slaving away in a little stuffy office, and working early and late to support a large and hungry family.

"And then the very idea of your making a chance shot in the dark and hitting me for your mark — ME,

probably the one man in all the Old Dominion most bitter against that grasping New York bunch. Why, I've been fighting them tooth and nail for a year, which may or may not account for the fact that they have not found their going any path of roses. Although I shall probably *not* return the munificent fee which you hinted at, I would be glad to do your job simply for the pleasure it would give me to slip another one over on them.

"And, as a matter of fact, your luck doesn't stop there. As far as my preliminary examination has disclosed, the only living heirs of old deVignier — the Lees' grantor — are still living in the little town which still considers itself under the protection of the Lee estate, and they regard the two sisters as angels upon earth — which, being Virginia girls, they probably are — and would gladly swear away their hope of Heaven for them. I've already got a confirmatory deed from them and there only remains their old brother, who ought to be easy when I catch him. So, if no others come to light, your troubles are ended. I'll keep you posted.

"With best regards to you and yours — if there are any 'yours' yet — I am,

"Sincerely,

"JACK."

"I'll be hanged if I don't agree with your correspondent's first sentence, John," said Mr. Hammond. "A chap as lucky as you does not deserve to live. Don't allow yourself to acquire an enlarged cranium, my boy; remember the old adage

'Whom the gods destroy they first make mad' and you have tempted Fate several times lately."

These frank words caused a chill of foreboding to pass through me for a second, but the feeling did not last. I was too supremely happy over the present to worry about the future.

"When Manners learns of how — to reverse the quotation — you have added injury to insult, I wouldn't be in your shoes," he added.

The balance of the afternoon I spent reading quietly, but early evening found me once more at the Aldriches' as suggested by Marion.

Mrs. Willard was on the portico, and the sound of our voices in greeting must have reached little Janet's room, for in a moment or two her nurse came down to say that her charge would not go to sleep until "Unke John" came up and tucked her in. I complied gladly, and after returning to the piazza spent a delightfully soothing hour with Margaret, during which our friendship deepened materially.

Time and again I was about on the point of speaking of my mission, but the occasion never seemed to serve exactly, and I had not the strength of will to terminate our congenial chat with such a serious matter. Moreover, I temporized with myself by thinking that, after all, my best method of attack would result from first securing Marion as

my staunch ally. Procrastination, thou art fatal! If I had only spoken then, how many heart aches, what deep despair would have been saved!

In the course of our rambling talk I mentioned Saturday night's episode, and asked if she knew what the explanation of it that Marion had learned was.

To my astonishment she replied that her sister had not mentioned the matter to her at all, and as I walked homeward, my heart warmed anew at this evidence of her loyalty, and reproaching myself bitterly for my earlier thoughts over her apparent mistrust.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN WHICH OF A ROMAN HOLIDAY

ACCORDING to all rules laid down by the poets, a man as much in love as I was should have spent his time sighing like a furnace and making woeful ballads to his mistress' eyebrows.

As a matter of fact, if the sun is bright, the young man's digestion is working well, and he has some absorbing endeavor to busy himself with, he is likely to devote very little, if any, time to such doleful occupations.

Such was the case with me during Marion's brief absence on her yachting trip. Tuesday was indeed a very busy day for me at the Casino, and it is fair to say that not until evening did I mope any over the fact that I was parted from my charmer.

The third round found me pitted against a certain Yale star who had been cutting a wide swath in college tennis circles that spring, and had won a number of fairly important events later.

He was a young "comer," fast approaching the front rank, brilliant but decidedly unsteady, whereas I was just the reverse, and the self-confidence which

had come to me as a result of my unexpected victory over Manners, carried me through our match with flying colors. Since I was seeking no special honors, I could not but feel somewhat sorry for my vanquished rival, for his disappointment over being defeated by a nobody, as he apparently regarded me, after his splendid early season record, was keen. With it he saw his hopes for a place well up in the National ratings go a-glimmering.

I was just congratulating myself upon getting my day's work off the docket, so as to be free to enjoy the challenge contest for the National Doubles Championship that afternoon, when the Secretary of the Association buttonholed me, remarking, "I see you won from young Willett, Shaw. Great work! If you keep up the pace you're traveling at now, the championship is going to change hands this year. Perhaps as a result, you are feeling good natured enough to grant a favor to your next victim, Phil Hasbrooke. He is really extremely anxious to get back to town on account of business, but had rather not default if he can help it. He wants to play this afternoon if possible, and ought to be easy for you. Can I put you down, say for two-thirty?"

The dictates of wisdom bade me refuse, for my morning match had been a strenuous one and the day was another sizzler, but I wanted to oblige the committee, and finally reluctantly consented.

Thus while the enthusiastic gallery was drinking in its fill of thrilling tennis on the grandstand court, I had to go out again into the broiling sun, and while my ears were being greeted with continual bursts of applause from the other side of the field, struggle through a long drawn out and uninspiring match against an aggravatingly soft hitter who got everything back with disconcerting persistence. So little was my heart in the game that I practically fooled away the third set, and then had to work like a Trojan to get back into my stride and win the fourth and match.

Still, I had the slight consolation of seeing my name chalked up on the big blackboard along with that of one of the most popular and brilliant of the young California stars, in the fourth round, one step ahead of all the rest. This match would, of course, spell my elimination from the tourney, and I was prepared to put up as good an argument as possible before bowing to my master, quite content with my showing in the event.

Wednesday morning I slept late, breakfasted in a hurry and, as strange as it may appear, utterly neglected to read the tennis story in the paper before rushing off to the Casino.

What then, was my amazement and consternation upon reaching the entrance at being greeted by the horror-producing neatly printed words upon

the announcement blackboards on either side, "Championship Court. M. E. McLoughlin vs. J. A. Shaw at 11 o'clock."

I could not believe my eyes. The idea that our match should be selected to be staged on the exhibition court had never for an instant entered my mind, and with wobbling knees and blood turning to water, I hastened to the locker building. So nervous was I that I could scarcely voice my stammering protests to the "Little Doctor," and, as it was, I might just as well have saved my breath, or talked to a stone wall.

"Of course I realize the way you feel, Mr. Shaw," was his propitiating response, "but the committee chose your match because there hasn't been a chance to put Mr. McLoughlin on the Championship Court before, and the gallery are clamoring for him. All the others who might properly be put on there have already had a chance or have easy matches to-day. Beside, your defeats of Manners and Willett are worthy of recognition, and we believe that you are quite capable of giving Mac a real match; so, you see, it's up to you."

"But for heaven's sake, I couldn't get a game from him! It'll be a slaughter, and, somehow, I'm not keen about furnishing a Roman holiday for the assembled multitude. Great Scott, can't you put yourself in my place and have a heart?"

"Oh, you are too modest, Shaw. If we think you can make it interesting for him that ought to satisfy you. Why, I thought you would be pleased to get a chance on that Court; it isn't everybody that does."

"I know that, and I feel highly honored, but I'm plumb scared to death. I'd rather default now than play there."

"Oh, come now, be a sport," chimed in several of the others, who were standing around us. "You can't any more then get beaten, and Maurie's human. You may catch him off his game, and, if you do, and play as you did against Willett, you'll give him a good run for his money."

"Sure," broke in Ned Witherbee, "you might lick him."

"Yes," I replied in deep disgust, "I might — if he broke a leg or fell dead on the court." But in the end I yielded, nevertheless, and with palpitating heart and a feeling inside as though I had eaten a pound of lead for breakfast, went to dress for the sacrifice.

Many a time and oft had I sat on the side lines and criticised some poor floundering fellow who was suffering an unmerciful beating at the hands of some star of the first magnitude, saying to myself, "Why on earth doesn't he do this, or that?" Never shall I do so again!

When I finally walked onto the court behind the flaming red head of the popular "California Comet," it seemed to me that each foot weighed a ton, and my head nothing at all. The quick burst of applause sounded in my ears like distant thunder, and the gallery, now rapidly filling the grandstand, appeared to be a confused and meaningless mass of swimming color.

"God favors the side having the heaviest artillery," said Napoleon, and, quite naturally, my mighty rival won the toss and elected to take the first service.

Mere instinct caused me to take the proper position, although the referee gave me a word of encouragement as I passed his stand, and I began to return the cannon ball shots as well as I could and frequently not at all. And, in due time, the battle was on.

My body truly acted automatically, but my brain refused to perform its natural function, and when I managed to return the elusive white sphere, I had the doubtful pleasure of seeing it go sailing straight over the center of the net as though I were aiming at him as a target, and high enough to give the waiting Nemesis an absurdly easy chance to kill it off — which he invariably did with ease and dispatch.

After a few rounds of applause produced by his brilliant shots, the gallery ceased to pay any par-

ticular attention to our exhibition, some departed, and from the rest arose a hum of many voices in discussion of anything and everything except the so-called contest. In time the idea grew in my brain, "How much that buzzing resembles the twittering of a multitude of gayly plumaged birds," an imagery which carried my thoughts to a forest, and I heartily wished that I was in the very middle of one at that moment.

Then my mind began to drum out, over and over, the phrase, "What a poor fool you are to lose your nerve like this, when nothing's at stake but a silly game," but that did not help any in changing the disheartening fact that I *had* lost it, and the answering thought came in time, "What a poor fool you are to let a mere boy, almost ten years your junior, make an exhibition of you like this."

The sing-song voice of the famous referee called off game after game for my opponent with clock-like regularity, and — as I afterwards learned — in just eleven minutes, one red ball, representing a love set, was hung up on the arm of the scoring machine under his name.

As I stood wiping the perspiration from my face and hands, by the canvas backstop, behind which the members of the press were seated in listless attitudes, I overheard one of them say, "Worst case

of plain stage fright I ever saw. He can do a darned sight better than that, but to-day he can't even hit the ball."

"Poor fellow, he must feel cheap," replied a young miss who had been smuggled into that sacred precinct.

This pitying remark furnished the last straw. I saw red, something actually seemed to snap in my brain, and the spell was broken.

My mind reasserted itself, I became cool and determined and toed the mark a different player, ready, nay, anxious, to get at the demon opposite.

The champion in the making had too old a head upon his youthful shoulders to let up even against a hopelessly beaten opponent, his world-famous service came hurtling in as swift and deadly as before, and, in another moment, another game, also won at love, was added to his fast growing string. But this time the feeling of utter helplessness within me did not follow, and with an assurance which surprised myself, I took up the task undaunted, and a short while after had the keen satisfaction of witnessing a small white ball — the first — go up on my side of the announcer.

The spectators, always ready and eager to encourage the under dog, applauded faintly, and this added a jot to my new determination.

Still almost helpless against his services, many of which I failed to get my racket on at all, so swift were they and so weirdly did they bounce, I nevertheless with dogged determination fought out three games on my own service, and the set terminaed with the very respectable score of 6–3.

'Tis said that nothing succeeds like success, and as we paused at the end of this set to make liberal use of the towels, which the ball boys tossed to us, Ned rushed over to the barrier next me, saying exultantly, "Now we've got him on the run, old boy. I'm on my way out to telephone the city band to come right up here and we'll have a swell little parade down Bellevue Avenue as soon as you administer the coup de grâce," but I paid little heed to him, for just at this juncture my eye fell upon Marion and her two escorts in the gallery, and she was looking toward me and smiling encouragingly.

Knights of old, story tells us, achieved deeds of marvelous valor when fighting under the eye of their ladies fair, and the presence of my dear one sent a stream of new courage and inspiration flowing into my heart. I gripped my racket as though it had been a battle ax, and strode forward to serve with my jaw set ominously. Let my wonderful young opponent beware now!

His first return came to me like a catapult, but

with the courage of a lion I smote it back even harder. If I had looked for "The Comet" to wilt in fear before my burst of speed I was doomed to disappointment. With a panther-like spring he shot the ball over the net for a clean ace.

I, not he, was the one surprised, but still undaunted I kept up the pace, playing as I had never played before, but as my game improved, so did his. The committee was right. I had found myself and rejoiced in the realization that I was giving the Pacific champion a real battle. But to what end? Try as I would, forcing game after game to deuce, sometimes repeatedly, I had not the punch to win a single one, and the set, although so different, ended as had the first, 6–0.

And so, in spite of the fact that I knew in my heart of hearts that I had performed better than ever before in my life, and put up a very creditable fight, tennis annals indicate that on that day in August, John Alden Shaw met with a crushing defeat at the hands of the boyish California marvel. But what of that? My friends all made a point of congratulating me upon my excellent showing, and commenting upon the fact that the last set, in which I had failed to capture a game, was, in reality, closer than the second in which I had won three. But I needed no words of praise or consolation. Let the score be what it might, I knew that I had mastered

my weakness and would never again be afraid to face any player — no, not the champion himself — and this moral victory took all the sting out of the defeat.

When I emerged from the dressing-room I found all the Aldrich party waiting for me on the piazza, and with Marion's hand clasping mine in approval I scarcely heard Bert rant forth, "Hail, mighty in defeat. Yours is the unique distinction of having lost the only love set of deuce games in the history of the world. I've been subsidizing the press in your behalf and to-morrow morning all men will read the scare headlines, 'JOHN ALDEN SHAW almost BEATS THE COMET, in spite of getting licked 6–0, 6–3, 6–0.'"

"We're all proud of you," said Marion, with a look which meant more to me than an actual victory possibly could have.

"But isn't he a wonder?" I replied enthusiastically. "In another year or two he will top them all, mark my words."

I would have been well pleased to have gone home with them, but at this point a group of their Newport friends joined us and insisted in carrying them away to luncheon, and I was not included in the invitation. As they departed I managed to slip in a whispered question to Marion, "What about last Saturday night?"

"I can't tell you now," she whispered back, "but will to-night; that is, if you care to run up to the house."

DID I care to?

CHAPTER XIX

IN WHICH THE CLOUDS LIFT AND I SEE THE LIGHT

Now and then there comes a night which seems as though it were too perfect to belong to this old world so filled with flaws.

Such a one was that which brought to a close the day of my defeat on the courts.

A refreshingly cool but wondrously soft breeze blew in from the sea like a messenger laden with tidings of peace and comfort. By its magic the sultry air was changed into life-giving elixir. It whispered gently through the foliage suggestions of love and happiness, and, under its caressing touch, the leaves murmured their happy response.

The distant stars, usually so unattainably far away, seemed nearer and brighter, and in the west, the moon in her last quarter appeared more like a jeweled crescent on the gem encrusted sable robe of Night, than a dead world. It was a dangerous night, a night made for dreams of love.

Nature held me completely in its thrall as, with fast beating heart, I made my way toward my goal.

My soul yearned to declare its love, but my brain answered, "No, you must be calm and strong, that cannot, must not be."

The spell of the night was on the Aldriches, too, and all the members of the family were seated upon the broad western veranda in a strangely silent mood, each deeply immersed in his or her own thoughts, when I crossed the velvety lawn and joined them. Even Bert's customary boisterous greeting was conspicuous for its absence, and I took a vacant seat and scarcely more than a nod or low word of welcome from each. It was an hour when nature's power draws men instinctively closer to one another and to their Creator in silent communication of the spirit.

Finally Ethel sighed deeply, and brought our minds back to the commonplace things of life, by saying, "I wish Tom were here. It's too bad to waste such a night as this, and I feel dreadfully spoony."

"Perhaps John might be persuaded to act as substitute," answered Bert, ever ready to seize upon such an opening. "I imagine that he could make good, and as homely as he is, he's certainly infinitely better looking than Tom."

"He's certainly not!" she replied heatedly, for she was a wife still passionately in love with her own husband.

"There, *that's* the kind of a wife for you," said Margaret.

"Oh, when outsiders are around the king can do no wrong and is the handsomest man alive, according to Ethel. But, take it from me, it's only for effect," replied the tormentor. "You'd ought to hear her rag him when they are alone, though — it's something scandalous — and as for admitting before him that he is even passably good looking — she'd lose a hand first. Oh, these women, these women, their name is inconsistency."

"I don't believe a word of it," I protested stoutly, putting my arm protectingly about Ethel's shoulders.

"Good for you, son-in-law-to-be, you are a man after my own heart, and you stick up for me," and she patted my hand affectionately. "You poor boy, you must be simply dead after your three days of hard matches."

"Dead? Not by a long shot!" I responded. "I feel as strong as a lion," and, to substantiate my assertion, I picked her up, chair and all, and swung her around till she shrieked out for mercy. "Why, I could go out and walk ten miles right now."

"So could I," broke in Marion. "And what a perfect night it is for a good walk. It's a crying shame to sit here idly and gossip."

"My idea of 'nothing to do' is taking a walk

"'IT'S A CRYING SHAME TO SIT HERE IDLY AND GOSSIP'"

when you're not going anywhere," said Bert, leaning back lazily and blowing out smoke rings. "If any foolishly callow youths and maidens want to go and deliberately wear out shoe leather, they may, there is no law against it, but you may count 'yours truly' out."

Marion ignored him and said, "Come on, Margaret, I'm sure a little walk would do you a world of good, you need mild exercise as much as rest, now. Don't you feel like it, dear?"

"Not to-night I guess, honey. I'll stay here and watch Bert take his exercise in an arm chair, and, if you go, don't forget that the ball at the Casino comes to-morrow evening. I shall expect you to be sound asleep in your little bed by ten at the latest."

"*You* come, Ethel," urged Marion, and 'though there was little heart in my words, I had, out of politeness, to join my request to hers.

"All right," she replied, promptly jumping up. "You two need a chaperon, anyway. I'll run in and put on my old gray bonnet and be with you in a minute."

This ready acceptance made my heart sink dolefully, but a few moments later it rose again with a bound, for Ethel came prancing out of the house in wild excitement crying, "Hoo-ray, speaking of angels. I just got a telephone, and what do you

think? Tom's back unexpectedly. He's at the depot now. He wanted to surprise me but the dear old thing simply couldn't wait to get here and had to 'phone the very minute he got in. *That's* the kind of a husband to be, John," and seizing me by the arms, she did a mad war dance about the piazza. "Go ahead and take your old walk, if you want to. I've got something a million times better to do now," and she hugged herself ecstatically in anticipation.

And thus Fate pulled the strings once more, and we two set forth into the magic moonlight, alone.

For a time we walked briskly and in silence, giving free play to our muscles and exulting in the rhythmic swing together, for Marion walked with the springy stride of a boy. Instinctively we turned down the avenue toward the cliffs, and, as we progressed, our pace slackened little by little, and we began to talk quietly of those things which interest a man and a maid.

I ended one long pause pregnant with silent night music, by saying suddenly, "Well, I never! Your mere presence has driven one thing that I have been meaning to ask about especially, entirely out of my mind until this instant."

"What is that?"

"Why, your promise this morning, of course."

"My promise?"

"To be sure. Don't you remember that you were going to tell me to-night what you had discovered about my mysterious epistle?"

"I didn't really promise, did I?" she asked hesitatingly, after a moment.

"You sure did."

"But I'm not so certain, on second thoughts, that I had better, or want to. It's a woman's privilege to change her mind, you know."

"So I've heard, but you promised."

"Oh, as for that, if I didn't cross my heart and hope to die, it isn't binding."

Helpless before this womanly logic, but all the more anxious to hear the story, I retorted, "All right, but I've got a secret about you which I won't tell unless you agree to disclose forthwith all you know about that affair of mystery." Oh, wise beyond my generation. What woman could withstand this method of attack?

"Very well, then, I'll agree. What is your secret?"

"Oh, come now, you surely don't expect me to get caught that easily a second time. Your story first, if you please."

"Well," she began slowly, "it really isn't much. That note was nothing but a joke a friend was playing on you."

"A joke? I must say that it is not my idea of humor. How did you find that out?"

"Why, I — I'd rather not tell."

"Ah, but you *did* promise this time.."

"Well," she hurried on, "somehow I thought that it must have been a joke. You see, I could not believe that you — you . . ."

"Well, I should hope not. I don't pretend to be any saint, but that particular kind of thing doesn't appeal to me."

"Sunday morning I ran away from the folks, and went to see her."

"You? You went to see her? You did that — for me?"

"No, you mustn't judge hastily. She really is not bad at heart, a bit. I stayed and talked with her about all sorts of things and really enjoyed my visit immensely."

"Well, you are an angel! I believe that you would see some good in Satan himself."

"Hardly that, although, indeed, I've often thought that his Satanic majesty was often blamed for things that he didn't have any hand in. And as for being an angel — it's plain to see that you have not known me very long. But this is beside the point. She admitted at once and without hesitation, that a man whom she had never seen before, but who told her that he was a friend of yours

and wanted to play a little joke on you, wrote the note and gave her ten dollars to toss it into our box."

"And who was this thoughtful 'friend' of mine?"

"She did not know his name, and could only describe him vaguely."

"What was the description?" I persisted with a quick premonition that filled me with seething anger.

"Oh, it doesn't matter, does it? It really was only a joke, so never mind who the perpetrator was. The whole thing is not worth giving another thought to."

"Was it Mr. Manners?" I insisted.

"I refuse to answer, by advice of counsel; besides, I really don't know," she replied with something of a start, as though my tone disturbed or surprised her. I needed to press my questioning no further and therefore replied lightly, "The question may be stricken out," and changed the subject abruptly.

Both scenting danger, we purposely kept the conversation thereafter along the lines of airy persiflage until we had reached the cliff walk, and, in time, the famous "Forty Steps."

Here I stopped as the result of a sudden inspiration, saying, "Let's climb down them for a mo-

ment and shut out the world of men above. Don't you hear the sea calling?"

She hesitated just an instant, then acquiesced, and with her hand in mine, and my heart pounding loudly, I aided her down to the little beach below.

Behind us now towered the ancient cragged cliffs fronting the broad Atlantic, and the rough stone ladder we had descended. Before, to the vague horizon stretched the mighty ocean across which the low hanging moon to the right sent a shimmering path of light straight to our feet. The sea was waveless, but everlastingly swelling and dropping like the breast of a calmly slumbering woman.

As we stood there in silence, side by side, drinking in the perfect beauty of the scene, I heard Marion sigh gently while the majestic power of nature laid its overwhelming influence upon our very souls.

She spoke at last, softly, "I am glad the cliffs hide from view those palaces of wealth above us. Nature in such a mood is too wonderfully perfect to be spoiled by any work of man's hand."

I did not answer. At that moment a great struggle was taking place within me. All my being cried out for me to tell of my passion, but I dared not, nor did I wish to speak at all while her mood lasted.

"Oh, when we have ever before us such mighty

patterns of God's truth and grandeur as the sea, the mountains, the desert, how can we men and women be so terribly narrow, petty and full of deceit? How can we little mortals help realizing how insignificant we really are, in the face of such majestic mightiness? And yet, so full of foolish arrogance and petty conceit are we, that, except on rare occasions like this perhaps, we blind ourselves to all this colossal perfection, and go about our own pitiably small affairs, filled with deceitfulness and meanness. Isn't this," and she flung her arms seaward, "almost too wonderful? Doesn't it seem as though you could actually hear the heart of the great deep throbbing?"

"Yes," I barely whispered. "But this beauty and your words have stripped my soul and left it naked and ashamed, Miss Lee. I realize now, as I have never before, that I, myself, am infinitely more filled with the deceit against which you have been protesting, than are most, and I know that I should not ask your friendship even for a moment longer, unless you are willing to hear my confession and be merciful to me, a sinner."

"You, full of deceit, Mr. Shaw? I don't think I understand."

"I do not wonder. Perhaps I should not even hope to make you understand in the way I should like to, but it is a fact. Will you let me tell my

story?" and as she nodded her assent I hurried on nervously, "That I have never told you any spoken untruth about myself is no mitigation of the fact that, for the past week, I have been living a lie,—for actions really do speak louder than words. I don't know whether I actually have, or have not, given the impression that I was a wealthy man of social standing — one, that is, belonging to the class which you belong to, and so worthy of your intimacy — but I have, nevertheless, tried hard enough to do so.

"As a matter of fact, I am nothing of the sort. I am as poor as a church mouse, and have little real prospect of ever being much else. And I know absolutely that, being such as I am, and the accepted standards of the world being as they are — no matter how false they may be, theoretically — I have no right whatsoever to force myself into that class and accept of its favors and yours, extended under a misconception of the true facts."

I do not know just what sort of an answer I looked for to this humble confession. Certainly I did not expect her to laugh, and when her silvery laughter rang out merrily as I finished, I was both deeply surprised and hurt.

But the latter feeling quickly vanished, for she replied, "My dear boy, I have known that for days, and that I have not in any way withdrawn

my friendship and confidence, should be enough to convince you that I have believed you worthy of it in spite of the fact that you may not theoretically belong to the so-called aristocracy of dollars — for the existence of which, indeed, there is no possible excuse."

Somewhat dazed by the naïve disclosure, which indicated that my great secret was no secret at all, I stammered, "You have known it all along? But how?"

"I think that I could have guessed it anyway, simply by reading between the lines of your conversation, for you have an earnestness and purposefulness which I don't find in the average young man of society, wealth and leisure to-day. But I won't pretend to second sight, and the truth is that somebody told me all about you, and I found nothing in the recital that should cause you to be ashamed of yourself or your position. Indeed it has never occurred to me that you were masquerading or trying to appear other than you were."

My thoughts got no further than her confession that she had been told all about me, however, and I interrupted shortly, "Some one told you? Has Bert broken his promise to —"

"Oh, no, indeed. You need not blame poor Bert, if he was supposed to conceal your purpose, or your lack of wealth. Indeed, if there had been any

need, I might perhaps have guessed the truth from the fact that he has tried so hard to give the opposite impression."

"Then, who on earth —"

"A little bird whispered it to me."

Again I experienced a feeling of hot anger which accompanied a premonition of the truth.

"Was it the same 'friend' who favored me with that epistle last Saturday night?" I demanded.

She did not respond, so after a moment I continued quietly,

"Miss Lee, I wish that you would answer that question this time. I can not just now tell you why I want you to do so, but I hope that you will believe me when I say that something extremely important depends upon your answer — important for you as well as for me, that is."

"Perhaps I ought to consider the source of my information as confidential," she replied doubtfully. "But you seem so very much in earnest —"

"I am, indeed."

"Well, then, your guess was right; although I don't see the meaning of it all."

"Manners told you?"

"Yes."

"But what was the occasion? Why should he think it necessary to make such a statement about me at all to you? I don't understand."

"Nor did I — unless perhaps he saw you with me so much that he foolishly thought you might be a — a possible rival, and felt that 'all was fair in love and war.'"

"Love? Do you mean to say that he has *dared?*"

It was apparently her turn to be astonished, for she said rather coolly, "Dared? Pray, why shouldn't Mr. Manners honor me with a proffer of his heart and hand, Mr. Shaw?"

I regret to say that my feelings overcame my self control. I uttered a crisp oath full of meaning, and she said in great surprise, "Why, Mr. Shaw!"

"Forgive me, Miss Lee, that was unpardonable, I know, but the utter nerve and perfidy of that man made me forget myself."

"I think that you had better explain."

"You may be sure that I intend to. A short time ago I happened to learn something very much to Mr. Manners' discredit, something that would make his asking you to marry him outrageous, if not actually an insult. In order to prevent me from disclosing it, especially to you, he set a detective to work in Boston to attempt to discover something that would give him the whip hand over me, and make me afraid to speak. The worst his agent could learn was, apparently, that I was not what I

was pretending to be here in Newport, but was masquerading — as I have confessed to you to-night, and to Mr. Hammond some time ago. He failed to fathom my true motive for trying to pass here for what I am not — a motive that you shall hear in a few minutes — but he did guess, and guess rightly, that, for a time at least, I wanted the facts concealed. At his own suggestion he bargained with me that if I would promise not to disclose what I had inadvertently learned about his affairs to his discredit, he would not divulge to any of you what he had deliberately found out about me. I have kept my promise, he has not. Now you know why I swore."

"I don't wonder that you are angry, Mr. Shaw, and, to tell the truth, I was myself. That method of trying to discredit one who, he believed, no matter how wrongly, was a rival, did not agree with my ideas of the most honorable way of pressing one's suit."

"No matter how wrongly?" I thought. Was it possible that she did not guess the true state of my feelings?

"He intimated in no uncertain terms that you were in Newport simply hunting a fortune," she continued, "but I think that I made it clear that I did not care either for his remarks about you, or his proposal. But still I do not see why his offer was

outrageous or insulting, even though his methods were not to my liking."

"Since he has first broken our agreement I am free to speak. Miss Lee, do you know who Manners really is?"

"Why, no, I know nothing about him other than that he has the reputation of being an extremely rich bachelor and, as such, a fine catch."

"Have you ever heard of the Virginia Woodland Development Company?"

"Have I? I should say I had. That iniquitous corporation has left no stone unturned to get hold of, and swallow up our own property in Fairdale, but unsuccessfully, I'm glad to say."

"Mr. Manners and 'that iniquitous corporation' are one and the same thing. He owns practically all of its stock."

"Do you mean it?"

"I do, indeed, and this is part of the interesting information that I stumbled on, and that he was so anxious to conceal from you and your friends. Mr. Hammond suggested that when he found out that you were in Newport he would probably try to acquire the land that he wants so much, by marriage, but I took that to be a joke and never thought for a moment that he would have the nerve to try it, although I won't pretend to say that this was his only reason for wanting to marry you. I'll do him

the justice of admitting that you yourself are an object altogether worthy of his coveting."

In the pale moonlight I saw her countenance take on lines of stern anger, and, after a pause, she said, "Will you please repeat your swear word for me, Mr. Shaw?"

"Gladly." Just for an instant I thought of telling her the rest of Manners' plans, and expectations, and what steps I had taken to circumvent them, but, on second thought, decided that it was wiser not to disturb her further until after I had completed my self-appointed task and averted the danger, since everything was apparently going smoothly in that direction. So I changed the subject by adding:

"But, Miss Lee, what you learned from Manners, and what I have confessed about myself tonight is only a part of the truth about my masquerade, and a small part. It doesn't explain the purpose of it, which is not 'fortune hunting.' I want to make a clean breast of it now, for it is something that you ought to know."

"What do you mean?" she asked in surprise.

"Will you please hear my story to the end without comment, and then judge me as fairly as possible?"

She nodded her assent without answering.

"Strange as it may seem, my pose was assumed

at the start as a method of getting to know you, yourself — or rather, your sister — and, I hoped, of becoming intimate with her. Needless to say, it has succeeded almost beyond my wildest hopes, perhaps beyond my deserts."

At this information she started, and looked amazed, but did not interrupt me, and I hastened on, unfolding as honestly as possible, but probably instinctively excusing and defending myself for the methods employed, the true purpose of my mission in Newport.

Although apparently several times on the point of giving expression to her astonishment, she remained silent, and I saw her face become paler and paler and assume a drawn look as I spoke.

When I had ended I waited for her to speak, it seemed to me an interminable time. Finally, she said, in a low agitated voice,

"Why do you tell me this, Mr. Shaw?"

"For two reasons. The first one, which has existed from the beginning of my mission, and is the least creditable, is because I wanted to gain you for a friend and ally, one whom I could count upon to help me move Mrs. Willard from the position she has taken, and at least to listen to her husband's plea. For truly I have not exaggerated a bit. You must believe me when I tell you that he is really more than ever deeply in love with her, repentant, and,

indeed, nearly heartbroken over this unhappy affair."

She did not wait for me to state the other, but interrupted saying, "You have told me fearlessly and frankly Mr. Willard's and your own version of the tragedy which promises to wreck his life and hers, and have quite naturally minimized the occasion. Will you now in your turn let me tell a story which may convince you that there are really two sides to this affair, as usual — one that may perchance convince you that Mrs. Willard was justified in what she did?"

"Of course."

She stood a moment in deep thought, and then commenced to speak in a low hurried voice:

"It is not easy for me to say what I have got to, to make you understand her feelings. For a great many generations the men of our family — which, incidentally, is only distantly connected with the branch which produced our idol, Gen. Robert E. Lee,— has been afflicted with a terrible, inherited taste for liquor. The women, on the contrary, instead of being similarly affected, have, by a peculiar twist of heredity, always abhorred drink with a bitter ingrained hatred. It is a sad fact that not a few of my male ancestors have died little better than drunkards, and my own grandfather, whom I remember well, was one of the old school Southern

gentlemen who drank heavily all his life. The trait skipped my father, who was always bitterly opposed to alcohol, but made its appearance again in my brother. Poor boy, he died only a few months ago, and his death, at only twenty-six, was hastened by, if not almost entirely attributable to, the insidious effects of drink."

She paused in deep distress and I was about to utter a word of sympathy, but she stopped me by raising her hand, and, as she let it fall, I caught and held it firmly in mine, and, somehow, I felt that she scarcely noticed this.

"Another singular characteristic has also run through our family. Although our menfolks have always been gentle and courteous in the treatment of their women, they are not naturally demonstratively affectionate except when under the potent influence of liquor. Thus sister and I always knew when Bob had been drinking heavily, from the fact that at such times he was ever so loving and affectionate in his actions. Indeed, this, in time, came to make both of us instinctively shrink from any lavish display of affection from others."

Again she paused, as though struggling to gain fresh courage to continue her recital, but spoke at last in scarcely more than a whisper. "When Roland Willard asked Margaret to be his wife, last

spring, the memory of Bob's unhappy end was still fresh in her mind, and, knowing that he drank like most society men, although, as far as she had ever seen or heard, always in moderation, she required from him a solemn promise to give it up entirely for her sake. He swore by all the vows a lover can utter that she was more to him than all the liquor in the world, and that if she would marry him he would never touch another drop.

"There are, doubtless, some cataclysmic upheavals in the soul which can change a person's whole nature, but any one who thinks that marriage is going to change or reform either a man or woman is, I'm afraid, doomed to bitter disappointment. You can guess the rest. Within an hour after the marriage the old tendency reasserted itself, he broke his promise to her — I won't say, willfully, but through a woeful weakness — and there then followed that scene in the cabin which brought Bob so vividly before her and filled her soul with such overwhelming shame, disgust and horror, that her only thought was to escape from him and the sacred bond which he had outraged and made unbearable by the unfaithfulness to his promise. And to this was added the fact, less in importance, that he really did hurt her physically as she struggled against his demonstrations. Now I have told you all, and you know why we feel as we do, why never,

never will Margaret go back to Roland Willard as his wife."

Her story had affected me powerfully. A flood of ungovernable anger rushed over me at first, but even though my sympathies were all arrayed against him, at least temporarily, stern duty counseled restraint, and I answered as calmly as I could, "Blame Margaret? Of course I can't, and don't blame her. Obeying her impulses as was wholly natural that she should, what else was there possible for her to do? And your disclosures contain more than enough to account for what at first seemed to us a strange and unnatural course of action. You can see yourself how strange it must have seemed to all of us, knowing only the fact of her desertion, that any woman who loved a man enough to marry him, could leave him on such apparently slight provocation. And please don't think me unfair if I say that even now it seems to me that the great love of a wife should forgive a lapse like his at least once, since to err is human — perhaps not at the moment of its occurrence, when she was all stirred up, but later, when her instinctive anger had had time to pass, and calmer reason to return. While wholly in sympathy with her I can still plead for Willard, you see, for I know that he is sorry to the very bottom of his soul. I believe truly that this affair has caused the kind of upheaval in his being that you

spoke of and that he would spend his life in expiation if she will but give him one more chance. Can't you believe it? Can't you see my point of view and promise me your help in bringing about a reconciliation, so that he may have at least that one last chance?"

For a full moment she did not reply, and I could see her breast rising and falling rapidly, as though she were physically wrestling with a great problem.

"No, no, I cannot. Don't ask me that," she broke out at last. "It would be a sacrilege. She cannot go back to him. She does not love him. I believe that she never loved him, it was only the infatuation of a young girl in love with love, and overpowered by his ardent wooing. No, no, not that. She must set him free. It is only fair — to him as well as to her."

"But he doesn't want to be set free, he loves her more than all the world, and, in spite of his broken promise, he is a man worthy of his love. Let her give him the chance and he will make her love him again surely. Then, besides, don't you see that her duty lies that way, and isn't doing one's duty the greatest thing in the world?"

"No, it is not! It is not!" she burst out again, trembling. "Love is that greatest thing, not duty. You plead well for another, John Alden Shaw, but suppose that you loved that wife greatly yourself.

Could you urge her then as you do now, or would you rejoice to hear her say, 'Why don't you speak for yourself?' Would you then stand there and say that duty is the greatest thing in the world, I wonder?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"That was your answer the morning that we talked about divorce, in the abstract. Now I am pleading for the woman whose heart and soul is actually in rebellion. She will not, she must not, go back to that hated bondage, sacrificing herself that others may not be led astray, as you put it then. She will be free, free to love again if she can, and find happiness where she can. Oh, don't let us talk about this any more, please; let us go home."

Now I was so aroused that reason ceased to be, and, forgetful of all my promises to myself and others not to give way to my hopeless passion, forgetful of my position and hers, forgetful of everything except my love for her, I cried.

"No, I cannot let you go yet, at least not until I have told you the other reason why I had to confess to you about my own deceit and perfidy. You must listen to me now, Marion, even though you tell me afterwards that I can never see you again."

She looked at me with terrified eyes and barely whispered, "What — what do you mean?"

"That I love you — love you, heart and soul! That love — my love — is the greatest thing in the world to me, and that for it and for you I would sacrifice everything else, duty and even my hope of eternity."

She looked at me with the terror in her eyes growing until I found it unbearable, and then with a moan, which pierced me to the heart, sank at my feet, and, throwing her arms out across a rock, buried her head in them and began to sob bitterly.

I fell on my knees beside her, trying to take her into my arms and uttering wild inconsequent words of inquiry, pity and love, but she thrust me away, sobbing out, "Oh, what have I done! What have I done! I am a most unhappy and a wicked, wicked woman!"

At length I pulled her hands away from her tear-stained face, and, holding them close to my breast, begged. "Don't say that. Tell me, sweetheart — tell me what is the matter."

I felt her hands grow cold, her whole body stiffen. Then she answered in a low pitiful voice, "I am not Marion. I am Margaret — Roland Willard's wife."

CHAPTER XX

IN WHICH THE LIGHT TURNS TO UTTER DARKNESS

THERE are moments when a mental blow has all the effects of a physical one. My senses reeled and flashes of light passed before my eyes.

Holding her hands with a grasp which must have nearly crushed them, I cried out, "Oh, no, not that! You can't mean that! It is unthinkable!"

"It is true. Oh, why did I not foresee this, or, guessing it, why have I let it go on? My woman's instinct warned me that I was playing with fire and that it would consume us both at last, and yet I could not tell you."

"Both?" I asked, the implication that she too loved, for the moment utterly wiping out the terrible facts.

"Yes — both, for I, too, have come to love you, John; love as I never have before or can again, and I am justly punished, but oh, why should the punishment for my sin fall upon you, too, my beloved one?"

"You love me, nothing else in Heaven and earth

matters," I replied triumphantly, again attempting to draw her into my arms, but she pushed me away, saying, "No, no, you must not. It would be wicked. We must be strong."

"Tell me dear one, that it is not true. Of course it cannot be a joke, and yet —" I stopped in sheer bewilderment, and she replied with the suggestion of a smile more pitiful than her tears. "A sad jest. It is true, Heaven help me, but oh, how little Marion and I saw into the future when we began it. John, John, until to-night I was, oh, so young and light. It has always been like that ever since we were children. Marion has always been the sensible, serious one, the one with the big heart and brain, and I thoughtless, pleasure-loving, flighty. She is really years older than I in everything that counts, everything except mere years. I do not wonder that you cannot believe it, and yet it came about so easily."

Then in halting, pathetic sentences, often interrupted by words of pity and exclamations from me, she told her story.

"When my cross fell upon me — the only great tragedy in my life, for the death of my father, mother and brother were natural events — my first and only thought was to flee to Marion's dear arms for refuge and comfort, terribly hurt of course, but, as I know now, not broken in heart nor really

deeply stricken. In a few days the bitter anguish from which I had thought I should never be free, began to pass away from me like a bad dream. Soon I became almost carefree, and, at times, nearly as gay as before. You see what a weak, worthless woman you have selected to fall in love with, how unworthy of your, or any man's, love. I have no excuses to make; there is not a soul to blame but myself.

"And so my enforced retirement began to become irksome. I found that I still loved life and gayety; that I was as capable of finding pleasure in them, even as I had before my marriage. I craved excitement to make me forget — for there were brief hours when the remembrance of that scene settled over me again like a dreadful pall. And then, just as we were about to leave Newport and go home to face the unhappy situation, Marion became seriously ill, and we had to stay. Oh, how Fate has been playing with me as a cat does with a mouse these last few weeks, letting me half escape only to draw me back and torture me again, me, whose life had always been so quiet and commonplace.

"Marion was confined to her bed; I was wild for the out-of-doors, where I had lived all my life. In a moment of reckless inspiration I suggested that while we were in Newport we change identities.

You see, at this time Roland was leaving no stone unturned to reach me, even having a paid detective watching me, and it seemed as though this plan furnished a splendid way of eluding him, too.

"Marion, ever the wiser, did not want to agree to my mad suggestion, but at length against her better judgment yielded to my importuning — I have always been able to wheedle people into giving me my own way like that — and, naturally, she did not see how any real harm could come from such a masquerade. Who could have? The change was an easy one to effect; it merely required that I should throw off my newly acquired womanhood and become a girl again, which was easily done, and we exchange names — for we were on the point of going from the Gilmans' to the Aldriches' where the servants did not know us. And as for the outer world, we looked so much alike that should any one meet me as Miss Marion Lee they could scarcely guess that I was not indeed my own sister, we were so little known in Newport. I did not go out into society, of course, but, on the other hand, ceased trying to conceal myself, and met people frequently, none of them ever suspecting that I was other than I pretended to be, nor would they have been likely to had they seen Marion as well, for, as a result of her illness, she looked older than I. I had some trouble in winning over the Aldriches, they were

very loath to be parties to such a deception, but I succeeded there as well. Indeed, the idea of circumventing the detective was the only thing that won them over, and, although they finally agreed to let me be known as Marion, they would not call sister, 'Mrs. Willard.'

"Then you came, and, you will remember, on our first meeting, jumped at the conclusion that I really *was* Marion, not Margaret. I thought it a great joke then, and, although the others urged me to let them tell you the truth, I overpersuaded them again, from a spirit of pure mischief. You were only a passing acquaintance, I thought, never, for one instant, imagining that you would at once become so intimate in the family, and such a constant visitor. They consented temporarily with the utmost reluctance, particularly Bert, who told me, with brotherly frankness, that I was a fool and would surely regret it —"

"Yes," I interrupted, with a flash of enlightenment over his remarkable behavior when he thought that I was becoming too interested in her at the outset. "Bert, you see, was the only one in Newport who knew my real errand here, and he warned me, too, in no uncertain terms against just what has happened."

"If he had only told you the truth then, how much would have been saved for both of us! Poor

boy, no wonder he has been nervous and irritable lately, knowing that we were living over a sleeping volcano.

"As time went on and our friendship grew more and more, it became constantly harder for me to disillusion you, although all the while I knew how wicked it was to keep up the deception — and dangerous, too — you see, a woman is born with a peculiar instinct which warns her when a man is becoming really interested in her. But I don't see, even now, why you didn't guess the truth. The family over and over again made the slip of calling us by our true names in your presence."

"I did notice that several times, but if I thought of it at all, it was only to believe that the slip was a natural one, you looked so much alike, and so firmly established was the error in my mind."

"Yes, I suppose so. At last there came a time when, to my terror, I found that I was really falling deep in love myself, John, and every night since last Saturday I have lain awake for hours, in bitter distress, trying to screw my courage to the sticking point and tell you the truth before it was too late, but when you were with me I never had the courage to speak. How little we foresee the possible consequences," she wailed, "or how, when we take the first step in deceit, we may be obliged to go on and on, ever sinking deeper into the quicksands of

falsehood, until they swallow up our very souls. You have every reason to hate me now with deadly hatred. But, oh, don't despise me, John, pity me!"

"Despise and hate you, you poor darling?" I cried, once more trying to gather her into my arms, but she still eluded me. "I love you infinitely more than before. We are both of us unhappy victims of fell circumstance, and I am infinitely more to blame than you, for my deceit was premeditated, and but for it this would not have come upon us. The future is dark. I do not know whither we are going, but I do know that I love you with all my being, and that you love me. Nothing else counts."

"Duty?" she asked, with that wan smile most pitiful to behold.

"Duty? Can you ask? Margaret, I have just been thinking how true the old Persian proverb is, 'We mortals walk through this life backwards, seeing only the path which we have traveled; the future, unseen and unknown, is unrolling upon us from behind.' We do not face it, as we so often say. No wonder we stumble and walk haltingly. But what are we to do?"

"I do not know, but we must be strong, oh, so strong. And now we must go home — at once."

This time I did not oppose her wish. In silence I aided her up the cliff, and in silence, only speaking occasionally of every-day things, and each

studiously avoiding the one subject that was filling our hearts, we walked through the darkness homeward. Once she stumbled slightly, and, for a single moment, filled with ecstasy, I held her close to my breast, and thereafter I held her hand unrebuked, the mere physical contact making a medium through which our souls passed into one another's.

When we reached the door of the Aldriches', I burst out in a wild, passionate whisper, "Margaret, I can't, I won't give you up! You are mine! What does anything else count if we are together?"

"Hush," she said, placing her two hands in mine, and I pressed my lips passionately first to one palm then the other. "You must go, go at once. We have got to think — I almost said 'to sleep'— over this, John, but I'm afraid there is little sleep for either of us to-night."

"Will you tell Marion?"

"No, no, I could not — yet. It will be the first secret I have ever had apart from her in my whole life," she added, with a little sob.

At this instant the door was flung open, and Bert's merry face appeared. "Come inside at once or you'll take your deaths o' cold standing out there in the snow saying good-by like a couple of moonstruck idiots."

How quickly we mortals can assume that which we do not feel! I found myself responding lightly,

and, for a little while, we talked about the coming ball, Margaret promising me the last dance. Then I said formally, "Good night, Mrs. Willard."

Bert looked at me in growing astonishment, and then a wave of tremendous relief passed over his countenance. "You know?"

"Why, of course," I replied calmly. "I have known for moons."

"Thank God, that's a weight off my chest. And now that you know the true inwards of our mixed-up affairs, I can impart to you both a bit of marvelous information. Before you stands the happiest man alive, for Marion — the real one — has tonight reconsidered her oft-repeated refusal and promised to be the future Mrs. Aldrich. How does *that* sound?"

I did not dare to look at Margaret. This new happiness which had come to her sister and to Bert, must needs make her trouble, as it did mine, seem blacker than ever by contrast.

Instinctively my lips formed the stereotyped words of felicitation, and so engrossed was Bert in his new-found happiness that if my sentences lacked anything of honest warmth he did not appear to notice it.

Margaret stood silent a moment, then said, "My dear, I wish you all the happiness in the world. Be

good to her, boy; she is worthy of the best that life can hold." Drawing his head down, she kissed him on the cheek, and then with a sob that wrung my heart, ran inside and up-stairs.

CHAPTER XXI

IN WHICH THE DIE IS CAST

WITHOUT, Japanese lanterns full of soft colors which made the distant gleam of the stars look diamond white; the Casino balcony converted into an added corridor with striped awnings, its plain board floor canvas covered. Within, a glare of radiance, strains of sweet dance music coming from the orchestra concealed in a leafy bower on the stage; men in conventional evening garb — men the possessors of princely fortunes: women, the cream of America's society, in gowns of shimmering silk, satin, priceless lace or cloth of gold — women on whose necks, arms, fingers, and in whose ears gleamed and glistened countless jewels — a king's ransom. This was the Casino on the night of the tennis ball; light, music, merriment, laughter everywhere.

Everywhere? There was one at least in the assemblage of merrymakers to whom this scene of wondrous beauty seemed a sham, an empty show.

The end of a day during which I had suffered the tortures of a mental Golgotha, found me with soul still on the rack, mind tortured, the clear light

of reason utterly unable to pierce the swirling clouds of dark despair.

I had not seen my dear one during the day, nor even dared to talk with her over the telephone, but in a moment perhaps, I was to meet her, hear her loved voice, hold her in my arms in the dance.

I had purposely not gone to the Casino until nearly midnight, excusing my late arrival to Mr. Hammond with the plea that I had to pack for my departure on the morrow, for I knew that the ball would hardly be in full swing before that hour, and I guessed that Margaret would not arrive much earlier to endure the gayety which must pain her as it did me.

For some moments I stood in the doorway, moodily regarding the happy dancers. She was not on the floor, I thought. Suddenly my heart stopped. Mr. Hammond had just swung past me, and in his arms was a vision of wondrous loveliness, gowned in creamy white, her neck and arms bare — Margaret. She wore no jewels, and needed none, but in her lustrous dark hair was a solitary red rose. I had never seen her before save in black, or a simple dress of white, and her beauty smote my senses like a blow. They disappeared into the whirling crowd, and I went outside and walked up and down the gravel path, still seeing her face and figure everywhere.

The music stopped. I returned to the ballroom and, with almost unseeing eyes, found her with her late partner and Bert, her escort.

I do not know just how we greeted each other, but the while I talked in sentences which seemed natural and commonplace enough to my ears, the one thought filling my brain was that we were together again. We might have been the only two in the room for all I saw or considered the others.

The orchestra broke into the staccato, whispering chords which prelude the wonderful melody of "The Barcarole" from the "Tales of Hoffmann," accenting it in slow waltz time. In every-day tones I asked the stereotyped question, "May I have the pleasure?" and found Margaret in my arms for the first time, her soft breath caressing my cheek as I bent over her.

She danced divinely, but I was not then thinking of that fact, and, after we had moved once about the floor, I guided her through the doorway, and down the veranda to a dim shadowed corner at the south end.

There we came to a stop, my arms still about her. I could feel her breast rising and falling close to mine. Without speaking, I drew her slowly closer and closer into my embrace. Her hands crept up from my shoulders and met behind my neck, her soft arms clinging tightly, while Heaven and earth

were forgotten in the wild throb of our pulsing hearts. She whispered something so softly that at first I did not catch it, but bending my head close to hers heard the barely spoken words, "Kiss me."

My eager lips sought and found her own in a lingering kiss which spelt forgetfulness. After one exquisite moment she said gently, "Now let me go, John."

Slowly my arms, and hers, dropped, she turned toward the railing and stood looking over the dim courts. I joined her and once more tried to take her in my arms, but she held me off gently, with her hands on my breast, saying, "No, you must let me go, John."

"Let you go?" I answered in an intense whisper. "Let you go? Not while I live! I love you more than life itself."

"What would you do?" she responded sadly, but in a calm, well controlled voice.

"Do? I would take you far away. Now, tonight, and never let you go again. Divorce Willard as you have planned, or, if you fail in that, Margaret, come with me, anyway. I will be all the world to you, dear. I will spend my life in loving you, serving you. I will make up to you all you may lose, my darling, if you will but let me."

"Would you then sacrifice everything for your love for me? Think what it would mean, John —

friends, your fair name, duty, your honor itself."

"Yes, I would sacrifice all of those if you love me enough to come.

"Margaret, I tell you truly that, although I am poor, I am as proud as Lucifer. I would joyfully give all the little that I have if you, too, were in poverty. There is nothing that could gall my spirit more than the feeling that I was, even for a little while, dependent upon your wealth and charity. Yet, even under these conditions, I can humble my pride and beg you to take me — yes, support me — until I can make a new start in life and earn for us both, so much do I love you. And, have no fear, with you for my incentive I would succeed."

"Wait, John," she interrupted. "Your love is overriding your reason. What of all your former pleas on behalf of law, conventions, duty?"

"I was wrong, all wrong, and you were right, I admit it freely. You, yourself, have persuaded me that love is the greatest thing, greater than all these."

"No, my dear. I have not persuaded you. Your own heart has convinced itself, but not your mind, and when you pause to think — oh, don't tempt me too far, John, or I — But you are a perfect lover, dear. Do you really care that much?"

"Yes, and more. But you — you do not love me enough to —"

The fierce intensity of her reply thrilled and almost frightened me. "Not love you enough? I do, I love you enough to sacrifice all these things too, and to do as you ask without a thought of the future. I could divorce my husband, or, if that is impossible, come to you without it, even though my reason shouts out that by doing so I would be deliberately entering the gates of Hell itself. How strange it is, John, that my wild plea for love supreme over all else has so captured you, while the seeds of reason which you sowed in my mind that morning on the cliffs only needed this great storm in my life to bring them to full growth. I see now, as never before, that to yield to our desires would mean that we were blindly sowing a crop of tares which, in after life, we would have to reap in bitterness of soul. Yes, your man-made laws and conventions are the safeguards of morality and the race, and no human being can safely say, 'I can ignore them with impunity.' He or she must sooner or later suffer the loss of everything worth while — except love, and even that, my dear, might fail at last. A house builded upon the shifting sands, you know."

"No, never our love, surely."

"I'm not so sure. When self-respect is gone

and the world has turned its face away, even that, too, is likely to wane. But, John, I love you enough to take my chance with you, open eyed. It would be easy, oh, so easy."

"Then you will—" I began exultantly.

"No. I love you that much, and more. Even if I were sure that on sober second thought you would not repent of your hasty step, I can not suffer you to make that sacrifice. Think, John, what it would mean beside the inevitable results in this case, if you, coming here to take me back to my husband, his trusted friend and counselor, should abuse that sacred trust and steal the wife for yourself. You would be the worst kind of a traitor, a very Judas who betrayed his friend with a kiss. We cannot help our love. It came unbidden. This wicked thing we can prevent, and my love for you makes your honor so dear to me that I will not let it be sullied."

"What do you mean, Margaret? You cannot think of going back. . . ."

"Yes. To-morrow morning I am going back to—" her voice broke,—"to my husband."

"Oh, no, not that! You must not! There is still divorce."

"No. I have thought it all out to-day. Now I would not be seeking my freedom honestly, nor for the reasons that have moved me to. The evil would

still persist, and if I married you afterwards, your breach of trust would be the same."

"But I cannot, will not, let you sacrifice yourself thus for me," I protested in anguish. "I can go away, never see you again, but not that. Why, don't you see? You are deliberately planning to condemn yourself to a life of hateful slavery, nothing less."

"No, John, you are wrong. Roland Willard is a good and worthy man. I believe it implicitly, now that my eyes have been opened. I shall be a faithful, perhaps in time, a loving wife to him. I may, in time, even be really happy — I'm sure I hope so — and I will be doing my sacred duty. I cannot pretend that I shall ever love him as I do you, or that he can ever be first in my heart, although he must never know that. No, dear, it is not for myself that I am afraid, but for you. I shall always pray that you may be strong for my sake, as I shall be, in the knowledge of your love. I shall even pray that in time you may come to love another and marry her."

"Never!"

"Don't make any rash promises, boy. A man may really love deeply many times, a woman only once, 'tis said."

"Oh, but Margaret, you are not really in earnest! This unthinkable thing must not be."

"It *must* be. It is the only way out of the shadows."

The utter finality of her answer left me in a daze. I could not force my mind to the realization that I was actually losing her. From within came floating the appealing strain, the English words to which run, "Lovely night, oh, night of love, be kind to happy lovers." Happy lovers! All the world was becoming a bitter jest.

I turned rebelliously and tried again to take her in my arms and kiss her, but she held me away.

"Not again, dear. I wanted that one kiss to test my purpose and to hide away in my memory book, which I now seal and put away in sweet lavender so that moths may not creep in and corrupt. I may take it out sometimes when I am alone, and cry over it a little. That is all."

Helpless before this unshakable decision, I could only whisper brokenly, "You are a braver woman than I am a man, and infinitely better." She placed her fingers over my lips. With a sudden resolve born of her courage, I said, "I will take you to Boston to — to him, to-morrow."

"No! no! I could not bear that; I must go alone! Come, we must go in, they are playing another number and Bert will be wondering where I am," and, although I gave her my arm, it was she who directed our course back to the ballroom. I

surrendered her into Bert's charge, and without touching her hand, bowed, and said, "Good-by," and then made my way as quickly as possible outside.

How I spent the remaining hours of the night I cannot remember clearly. At one time I stood on the spot where we had watched the magic sunrise together, at another, at the foot of the Forty Steps, the bitter-sweet memories adding poignancy to my despair.

Once the idea came, to end it all there, but the ingrained instinct of self-preservation was too strong, and the thought passed.

As the gray dawn began to break dully, I headed for home. Once an early milk wagon passed me, and I heard, as though spoken afar off, the words which the driver did not try to keep from my ears, "Lookit the society souse beating it for home in his glad rags. Wonder where he lost his buzz wagon."

No one was astir at the Hammond house and I let myself in and reached my room unnoticed. Once there I cast myself upon the bed, still dressed, and fell into the sleep of utter exhaustion.

CHAPTER XXII

IN WHICH I BURN MY BRIDGES

Mr. Hammond's hearty voice and heavy hand on the door aroused me.

"Wake up, lazy bones! You may not know it, but you're far too busy a man to oversleep of a morning. Here's a telegram that requires your immediate attention," and he slipped the thin yellow envelope under the door, and added, "Have a good time last night?"

"Very fair," I answered mechanically and only half awake, and then the flood of black memories engulfed my mind, and I turned on the bed with a groan and hid my face in the pillow. My host must have caught the sound, for he called, "Not sick, are you, John?"

"No, thank you. Just done up a bit."

"Well, don't get up unless you find that you have to. I guess you've been overdoing it a bit lately, burning the candle at both ends. Take it easy this morning, breakfast will keep."

I rose and picked up the telegram, surmising that

the message was from my Petersburg correspondent since he was about the only person to whom I had sent my Newport address, but before opening it, undressed and indulged in a stinging cold plunge which revived my body, without helping my mind.

The message read, "OLD BROTHER REFUSES TO SIGN UNREASONABLY HOSTILE TO L FAMILY BUT THINK HE MAY BE BOUGHT FOR WHAT SUM HAVE I YOUR AUTHORITY TO DRAW ON YOU FOR FUNDS IF NECESSARY."

I experienced a further feeling of deep dejectment. Was I to fail in this endeavor too, just when success seemed assured?

In my present upset state of mind it seemed to me that Fate had suddenly turned upon me maliciously, and after leading me deep into the bog by her will-o'-the-wisp of early successes which gave such glowing promise of final accomplishment of all my dreams, was now leaving no stone unturned to thwart and injure me.

"Whom the gods destroy they first make mad." Mr. Hammond's quotation came afresh into my mind. Truly I had been mad. Was I now to be destroyed utterly?

But, as I dressed, the thought grew in my mind that this new turn of affairs offered, in a way, a partial solution to my immediate problem, for my being revolted at the thought of returning home to

take up the dreary work again at the office where my disastrous mission had had its inception, with the chance of meeting Mr. and Mrs. Willard at any time.

It was peculiar but true, that at this time so filled was I with my own trouble that I entirely overlooked the fact that in reality my main mission had been successfully ended and that I had accomplished exactly what I set out to do.

Here, then, was an opportunity for temporary relief. I would go to Petersburg myself and, if possible, complete the task Jack had undertaken and begun for me, for I knew that even if I had to draw on Mr. Willard's money, it would meet with his approval from a business standpoint, and I cared in no other way.

The more I thought about it the stronger it appealed to me. The very bottom of my little world had fallen out, I could see no light in the dark future, and all I knew was that I wanted to get far away from everything that would remind me of the past.

To get away from it all! The idea became an obsession and as soon as I got down-stairs, entirely careless of the future, I wrote a brief note to Thomas, Richards and Henry advising them that I would not return to their employ. I would burn all my bridges behind me, come what might.

After a tasteless breakfast, during which my host insisted that I must be ill, I used the telephone to such good advantage that in a few moments I had engaged passage and berth on the nine-fifteen train for Virginia that evening.

I explained the reason for my hasty departure to Mr. Hammond, and he once more proved himself a true friend, by taking me to his bank and giving me a certified check for twelve hundred dollars in exchange for my own which represented Mr. Willard's thousand, still practically intact, and all my own worldly goods, with the exception of a moderate sum in a savings bank.

We parted at noon with expressions of much regret on both sides and with mutual promises to renew our friendship at another time, and by the middle of the evening I was speeding away from the scene of my tragedy, as fast as a modern express train could carry me. Before retiring I wrote a letter of thanks to Hammond and the Aldriches, one of congratulation to Marion and Bert, and tried many times to indite a note to Margaret, finally tearing up the final copy. There was really nothing more to be said.

But twelve days had elapsed since that fatal morning in Mr. Thomas' office — a long or short period depending upon how one regards it. For some it would represent as many days of toil and

sleep and thirty-six meals, to others it is time enough in which to win a kingdom or make a fortune. In it I had found and lost a soul, and changed from a happy boy into a sober, serious man.

By this time doubtless, my former chief had learned from Mr. Willard that my mission had been crowned with complete success, and was congratulating himself upon his perspicacity in the choice of his agent, and perhaps wondering what would be a proper fee for professional services in re "return of one erring bride to her husband's arms."

As I lay tossing and turning in my stuffy berth, the heat almost unbearable in spite of wide open window and electric fan, my thoughts pictured kaleidoscopically again and again each incident of my stay in Newport until the moment that Margaret had parted from me.

Beyond that point they refused to go. The thought of her as Roland Willard's wife was intolerable.

Before leaving New York I had telegraphed to Jack of my coming, and when, just before eight o'clock on Saturday morning, I disembarked from the train at the Byrd Street station in Richmond, I found him waiting to meet me.

We had not set eyes on each other since law school days four years previous, but the unmistakable warmth of his welcome went a long way to-

ward cheering me up. Together we made the short trip to Petersburg and there he carried me off to his own home. When we were inside he turned and placed his hands on my shoulders, saying, "Old man, pardon my frankness, but you look like the devil. Either I've been doing you a grave injustice, and you really have been working your head off, or else the gay life of Newport has done its deadly work. Now I've got an idea and a proposition, and since I won't take 'no' for an answer, you needn't bother to reply at all.

"Usually about this time of year I take my vacation. Go on a camping trip all by my lonely among the Cumberland mountains, which are nowadays so much before the public eye as a result of the innumerable thrilling novels they are grinding out, dealing with the manners and feuds of our unregenerate mountaineers there. I've postponed it to date in order to get this affair of yours cleaned up first, but just the minute that's finished, it is me — that is, us, now — for the tall hills and the tall timber. It's God's own country for beauty, and in the part I visit, about as wild as they make it. In fact, few men could go there and carry a gun with impunity. The ordinary stranger who tried to hunt it, would pretty surely meet with a fatal accident sooner or later, but I'm a privileged character, so to speak.

"My father came from that beautifully uncivilized blood-pure stock and although I am looked down upon as a degenerate, I am not a 'furriner' but still one of the clan, and can therefore wander about at will. I suppose they regard me something as we would a harmless idiot, to be pitied, but free to come and go unmolested and regain a little health and strength at the fountain source.

"It is truly a wonderful country, and you're sure to enjoy it tremendously. Why, a fortnight there will make a new man of you, or I miss my guess.

"Now that being all nicely settled"— I had not had an opportunity to say a word —"let's get down to business and get it over with. I'll blow up and burst if I have to stay in this sweltering heat another day."

I had no thought of refusing his proposition. It came to me like a gift from Heaven: a floating spar to the clutch of a ship-wrecked mariner adrift on a stormswept sea, and like a drowning man, I seized upon it, for it offered a chance to see and do something new which might make me forget a little.

In the hour before lunch I told him all I knew of Manners' plans and operations, and Jack added materially to my own knowledge about the company's methods and the present situation.

The Lee homestead, together with quite an extensive estate and holdings, he said, were located

some twenty miles west of the city, just at the edge of one of the sections of the commonwealth rich in forests of cypress, short-leafed pine, and red cedar. This whole tract of valuable woodland, except for a comparatively narrow strip which pretty nearly bisected it, had been acquired, much of it, by the most bald-faced chicanery, by the Virginia Hardwood Development Company, a corporation of unscrupulous New York promoters under the leadership and thumb of Manners. Borroughs had already been retained in several instances to fight its encroachments, and had been generally successful, although with its almost limitless resources and the services of several of the leading New York and Richmond attorneys at its command, it had come out victorious in one or two cases.

He was, therefore, in the present fight heart and soul, and extravagantly protested that he would give a year from his life to beat them soundly on this particular point, for the narrow strip of land which belonged to the Lee family was, if not exactly indispensable, of tremendous value to the corporation in getting out its cut wood with facility.

Colonel Lee had purchased this strip nearly three years before, primarily to protect his homestead, which was situated near it, foreseeing, even then, just what was now occurring, and in that deed,

given by one Edith deVignier, occurred the possibly dangerous flaw which one of the aforesaid unscrupulous but clever lawyers had lit upon.

It had taken Jack some time to untangle the facts surrounding the giving of the deed in question, so peculiar were they. It seemed that the estate proper had been purchased by a Lee forebear from the father of the present generation of deVigniers, more than sixty years before, but the original grant did not include the wood strip which was the subject of the present controversy.

This had passed by will in the distributing of deVignier's remaining estate, to his youngest daughter Edith, a minor, much younger than her next oldest sister. She had sold it for a moderate, but wholly adequate consideration to Colonel Lee, as they all supposed on the very day that she became of age, some three years before. She died within a year, leaving as her only heirs the two old sisters whose signatures to a confirmatory deed Jack had already acquired easily, and a still older brother who was our present stumbling block. All this history Jack had dug out with the help of the two living sisters and the old family Bible, and, according to its testimony, Edith had indeed attained her majority on the day that the deed was dated. They could distinctly recall that all her little birthday parties were held on that day of the month,

bolstering up their memories by the means of innumerable family incidents connected therewith.

But despite all this accumulative evidence the Parish register, through some mistake, inexplicable to them at first, had her birth recorded as a day later, and in time one of the good old ladies remembered that their baby sister was born almost exactly at midnight and whereas their father had evidently decided that the great event occurred on the twenty-first, the family doctor had apparently in making out his certificate called it the twenty-second. This record being *prima facie* evidence of her age, she was still a minor when she gave the deed, and if it, rather than the family Bible, were right, the deed was voidable.

The attorney who had discovered this discrepancy had not talked with the old ladies, but Jack strongly suspected that he *had* with their brother. If his memory of the facts had been refreshed along the lines of the corporation's desires, and he could be prevailed upon by it to make its interests his own, we might be up against it, for a deed given by a minor is voidable unless reaffirmed by the grantor after coming of age, and in this particular case she had died a short time after without either reaffirming or avoiding it. Her right to do so of course passed to her legal heirs.

Since all parties took it for granted that the deed

was a perfectly proper one; her sisters and brother had, up to the present, taken no action either.

By law, if Edith were really a minor when she gave the deed, she would have a reasonable time after she became of age to avoid it, and since she died before such a time had expired, the question then arose, whether or not her heirs, by sleeping for three years on their right to do what she might have done — that is, avoid the deed and reclaim the land — had lost it.

This was a very pretty legal question, and, Jack told me, close to the line under Virginia law. He had found no case directly in point but there was a decision back in the eighties, and prior to the statute enabling a married woman to convey as though single, which allowed one who had conveyed property when under legal age, to avoid that deed twenty-eight years later and three years after her husband died. Jack was afraid that the corporation attorney would see the analogy between this and the present case and rely upon that decision as authority that three years after becoming enabled to act was not so long a time as to bar the heirs, or any one of them, from acting.

He pointed out that whether this theory would hold water was a doubtful question, even admitting that the deed was given while Edith was still a minor, but if the corporation could, for a small

sum, buy the elder brother to make the claim, they would have at least a fighting chance of getting the land for little or nothing, or they might be hoping to use the threat of a law suit over the land to force the Lee sisters to sell it to them. Personally, Jack thought this the more likely.

As he had told me before, he had easily gained the signatures of the two old sisters to a confirmatory deed, as soon as he could make them understand what it was all about, for they looked upon it as their sacred duty to do everything in their power to carry out the clear intentions of their dear, dead sister, and so prevent injustice being done through a technicality. Not so their brother. Jack said that he could not say for certain whether or not he had actually been approached by the corporation's attorney, but if not, he had displayed a surprisingly keen grasp of the fact that here was a situation which might somehow be turned to his advantage, and with an acuteness that took Jack off his feet, had calmly refused to join in the confirmatory deed, until, at least, he had given the matter his most careful consideration.

This was the situation at the present moment, but so confident was Jack that even if the company did succeed in bribing deVignier to make entry for the purpose of avoiding the deed, we could defeat the claim, that he strongly advised me not to offer the

old codger over a hundred dollars at the most, for his signature to the confirmatory instrument.

Our discussion of the various points of this peculiar situation lasted through lunch. At its termination Jack rose, saying, "There's nothing like striking while the iron's hot. Just about this time of day we should run into the 'Colonel' ensconced on the piazza of the 'Mansion House'"— which, he explained, was a family hotel where many of the old customs of "befo' de war" still persisted.

As we walked toward that hostelry he primed me for the coming interview. "You'll find that you will have to handle the old fellow with kid gloves, John. He's quite a character, in fact I think that he prides himself on being an exact reproduction of a Southern 'colonel' as they are caricatured by your comic weeklies up North. The 'Colonel' part of his name is, by the way, only a myth. He has gracefully appropriated that honorable title for years, although he never belonged to any military organization in his life, and, it is said, went so far as to sham illness to escape being drafted at the end of the Civil War. But, knowing this, don't for goodness' sake look astonished if he should apologize for failing to rise when you meet him, on the ground that his old wound is so stiff."

"That's another myth, but he has told the story so often that it has become one of his pet memories,

and I should not be surprised if he really believes it himself by this time. The fact of the matter is that he broke his ankle falling over a stone wall in his mad rush to escape when a false alarm was raised that the Yankees were headed toward his home. I don't know where his share of courage went to, for his father and all his ancestors were regular fire-eaters."

CHAPTER XXIII

IN WHICH OF CERTAIN NEGOTIATIONS SUCCESSFULLY CARRIED THROUGH

We set forth, and, sure enough, there on the low veranda of the Mansion House was the object of our search, leaning contentedly back in a cane-seated chair, with his feet elevated to the railing. A heavy cane lay on the floor at his side. It was all I could do to retain my mirth, his appearance coincided with Jack's description so exactly. "Colonel" deVignier was, at this time, in the neighborhood of sixty-five years old, tall and stately in bearing — though somewhat gaunt — and possessed of a wonderful sweeping mustache and goatee, snow white save where stained a rich seal brown by tobacco juice, and his head was covered by a thatch of thick white hair worn long. He was clad in a loose suit of butternut brown almost martial in cut, but genteelly shabby, and wore a broad-brimmed gray felt hat and a flowing black tie. Every moment or two he expectorated over the railing with wonderful accuracy without even changing his position.

Jack, with his hand on my arm, steered me half-

way past the house, then stopped suddenly, as though having just noticed the "Colonel," and turned into the path casually, calling, "Good afternoon, Colonel deVignier. Seeing you here reminds me of that little matter we have been discussing. Can't I bring that deed around for your signature this afternoon? Oh, pardon me, John, you must meet our Colonel deVignier. Colonel, allow me to present John Alden Shaw of Boston."

"Ah'm honored, sah," said the colonel, removing his hat with a stately movement, in spite of the fact that he was seated. "Ah trust that yo'll pardon ma not risin' to greet yo', sah, but this damned humid weather inev'tably starts ma old wound to throbbing afresh. 'John Alden Shaw,' did yo' say, Mister Borroughs? The name has a familiar ring to it, sah. Perhaps yo' are a descendant of that worthy Puritan so famous in hist'ry and lit'rature."

I modestly admitted the allegation.

"Ah congratulate yo', sah. A splendid and virile band of heroes scarcely inferior to our Virginia gallants who reached this continent a few years previous, and from one of whom Ah have the honor of descending. A great race, sah, a splendid heritage."

I was a little in doubt whether he was now referring to my ancestors or his own, so I replied, "I am indeed honored to know you, Colonel."

He waved his hand with a depreciatory gesture, saying, "Won't yo' take a char, sah?" His invitation did not include Jack, so I thanked him but remained standing, and my comrade, grinning delightedly behind our host's back, said, "Well, Colonel, what about that little matter? Of course you're going to do the right thing and give us your signature to the confirmatory deed."

The colonel drew himself up impressively and gave Jack a withering glance from beneath his heavy eyebrows. "Mister Borroughs, sah, Ah do not car' fo' the implication contained in yo' remark, sah. Yo' may be sho' that Ah will do the right thing, as ma conscience shows it to me. As yet Ah have not given the matter ma serious consideration. Ah beg that yo' will not bother me with such a trifle now, nor am Ah in the habit of discussin' matters of business in the presence of ma guests."

Jack did not appear a particle impressed, but replied breezily, "Oh, as far as that goes, you need not worry. It happens that Mr. Shaw is Miss Lee's Boston attorney and, as such, somewhat familiar with the facts." He winked at me and I seized this cue to ask, "What matter is that, Borroughs?"

"Why, that possible question about the deed to the Lee woodland. You know that it has been suggested, because of the recent activities of a questionable nature by the Hardwood Corporation, that we

make assurance doubly sure and cure that possible technical flaw in the deed by imposing upon the present deVigniers' good nature for a confirmatory instrument, rather than go to the bother of having the Parish register corrected so that the day of Edith's birth would appear thereon to be August 21st, as it really was."

"Pardon me, sah, but without going into the merits of the affair Ah might say that yo' second proposition may be easier said than done," broke in the colonel. "Ah have not gone deeply into the matter, as Ah said, but Ah have casually inquired of our fam'ly doctor's descendants — the good old doctor, a truly remarkable practitioner has gone beyond" — he added for my benefit —"and they have given me access to his memorandum book. It distinctly gives the date of ma baby sister's advent into this world — Ah think of her still as a baby, gentlemen — as August 21st, and if ma memory — and Ah might say that Ah have a really remarkable one — serves me, that is correct, family tradition to the contrary."

This information was hardly encouraging, but I replied in as off-hand manner as possible, "Oh, yes, I remember, that was one of the minor matters about which I came to confer with Mr. Borroughs." I salved my conscience with the quibble that it was in reality a "minor" matter. "So this is *the*

Colonel deVignier. That being the case you need not regard me as a stranger to the matter, and, indeed, I'll add my request to his so that I may report the satisfactory termination of this question to Miss Lee — Mrs. Willard, I should say. There is no question about the propriety of your signing the deed which Mr. Borroughs has asked you to, I assume."

"Yo' assumption is wholly unjustifiable, sah," he replied hotly. "As Ah have previously remarked, Ah have not yet given the matter any serious consideration, but if, upon looking car'fully into the facts — all the facts — Ah should find that any advantage had been taken of my dear deceased sister, merely a child when she died, Ah assure yo' that Ah would consider it ma sacred duty — ma sacred duty, sah,— to see that belated justice was done. Fo' maself, Ah have absolutely no desire to add to ma possessions, but fo' ma po' sisters," he brushed his hand across his eyes affectingly, "if they have been robbed of their birthright all these years, Ah tell yo' Ah would fight the matter to the highest co't in the land, sah, until justice is done."

"Your stand does you credit, sir, and I trust that I would do the same myself," I responded warmly. "I honor you for it, but if the facts are as I understand them, no injustice has been done, but a very grave one would result if because of a mere technical error in recording, your sister's clear intention was

defeated and the Lees robbed of their purchase. The question arose in our minds only because a certain Northern corporation, with whose name and purpose you are doubtless familiar, having failed to buy this land from those patriotic girls, your Misses Lee, to strip of its verdure and beauty, have openly boasted that they expect to obtain it because of the flaw which they say makes the deed avoidable. Of course the only inference is that they expect to bribe one of Miss deVignier's heirs to contest the validity of the title on their behalf."

"Do yo' mean to insinuate that a corporation, and a Northern corporation at that, could bribe a de-Vignier; could bribe me, sah?"

"Most assuredly not, Colonel. Such a thought is impossible. I merely mentioned that as our reason for thinking of taking up this matter at all. By the way, won't you join us in something a little refreshing, sir? In fact, since I am a stranger in your beautiful city, won't you order for us on my behalf?"

The colonel beamed, then scowled quickly, "Ah hope, sah, that yo' do not expect to influence ma decision on this matter in this way."

"No, indeed. Life is too short and full of disagreements at the best, for a lawyer to make the quarrels of his clients his own. I try to play the game all open and above board with all the cards

on the table, and keep on friendly terms with my opponents outside the court room, and can therefore ask them to drink with me, with no concealed or sinister meaning."

"Just my position, sah," he replied, smiling in anticipation again, "In ma younger days Ah always said Ah could drink with an enemy and kill him with equal pleasure. On a warm afternoon like this Ah suggest one of our inimitable mint juleps, if it meets with yo' approval."

"The very thing. I have always wanted to try your famous Southern drink in its own habitat." The juleps were mixed under the colonel's own eye, brought, and consumed in the most friendly manner imaginable, and Jack insisted that one good drink deserved another, and a second round was prepared at his order.

The air became charged with good spirits, and the colonel with interminable long-winded reminiscences, and so half an hour passed.

Then Jack and I arose to take our departure, on a signal by him. The colonel evidenced great surprise at our early termination of a most delightful afternoon, and added earnestly, "Allow me to say, gentlemen, that Ah will give the trifling matter yo' have mentioned, ma close and immediate attention. Of co'se, sah, if the facts are as yo' have stated them — an' Ah have no reason to doubt yo' word

in the matter — the honor of ma fam'ly demands that Ah sign yo' deed, yo'— er affirmatory deed at once, as yo' request.

"In fac', as a gentleman dealing with gentlemen, Ah should not hesitate a moment to do so without mo' than yo' request, were it not fo' ma po' sisters. But sah, Ah could not in honor, permit them to be robbed of their birthright. That Ah could not permit, and it is for them only that Ah think."

"I understand and appreciate your feelings, Colonel, but I feel certain that upon full investigation you will arrive at the conclusion that our contention is entirely correct, and your attorney will doubtless advise you the same way."

"Ah'm inclined to believe that yo're right, but Ah do not wish to act over-hastily. Mr. Borroughs has been kind enough to act fo' me in a few matters of minor impo'tance —" Jack later confided to me that once, out of charity, he had appeared for him in a poor debtor suit against him —"and were it not that he represents my possible opponents in this, Ah would refer it to him with perfect confidence. Ah rely upon his judgment entirely sah, an' Ah assure yo' that he is one of, if not the leading young member of the bar of this city."

Jack thanked him seriously for his kind appreciation and I added, "In a case of this nature Colonel, there is always the possibility that your counsel,

while believing that your rights, if any, were so uncertain that the chances were that a suit would terminate against you, might, nevertheless, advise you to commence action to protect them. Any litigation of that nature would, I am sure, be distasteful to my clients, and I feel that I have their tacit authority to give you what such a suit would cost us to defend,— say one hundred dollars,— to prevent its being instituted."

"Ah couldn't think of accepting such an offer, generous as it undoubtedly is from yo' standpoint, sah. Ah could not but feel that it was selling ma, — that is, ma sisters' birthright fo' a mere mess of pottage."

"Or even two hundred. I am sure the Lees would not want me to haggle with a friend and neighbor over any amount within reason."

"Ah ver' much appreciate their attitude and yo's, sah, but —"

I had cashed my certified check on the way down town, and now meditatively drew forth a most imposing roll of yellowbacks, and began to thumb them over thoughtfully, saying, "Perhaps I might even say that if three hundred would be an object —"

I heard Jack gasp, and a stolen glance showed me that the colonel's eyes were nearly popping out of his head, but he was game. "As Ah have intimated, Mr. Shaw, between friends money is no object. It

is the principle involved, and Ah must refuse. Yo' may be assured, however, that Ah shall give the question my painstaking attention without delay, and furthermore, if Ah can see ma way clear to oblige yo', yo' may be sure that Ah will coöperate with ma neighbors against the common enemy, the Northerners — begging yo' pardon, sah."

"I am delighted to hear that, sir, and for such an ally in our just fight against the further encroachment of a grasping corporation, I would even say four hundred."

He shook his head with a sad smile. "Yo' forget ma sisters. No sah, Ah could not consent without first conferring with ma old friend and counselor, Judge Roberts of our supreme co't."

"Or even five hundred," I finished, regretfully returning the roll to my pocket, whereat Jack drew a big sigh of relief, and the expression on the colonel's countenance was so ludicrous that I nearly laughed in his face. With a final word of adieu we started for the steps, Jack fairly pushing me out of danger's way, and I said over my shoulder, "Colonel, this meeting has given me much pleasure."

"The honor is mutual sah," he fairly shouted, "and believe me, Mr. Shaw, rather than let yo' depart with the idea that Ah am unreasonable in the position Ah have taken, or that Ah'm influenced by the prospect of acquiring a ver' considerable for-

tune — for the land, though sold for a mere song, Ah repeat, a mere song, is now of great value, Ah'm informed — Ah would agree to accept yo' proposition on the spot. Indeed, sah, rather than that, Ah'll now waive all personal considerations and accept the, er, five hundred was the figure Ah believe, in the spirit in which yo' offer was made — and here's ma hand on it, sah."

From the agility with which he came down the steps one would never have supposed that he was crippled by an old wound, and I thought Jack was going to drop dead at this turn of affairs.

I could imagine the thoughts that were running rampant in his mind, and he may well have considered me the victim of a sudden attack of insanity thus to pay such a sum to defeat a possible claim so remote that the chances were one hundred to one against its validity. But he could not read my mind, or possibly know that I would have given all I had to protect Margaret's property from a hint of danger, and her from a moment's worry. It had wholly ceased to be a business proposition with me. It was an offering on the altar of love.

A moment later the colonel's flourishing signature had been affixed to the deed and a receipt, he was richer by five brand new hundred-dollar bills, and was toasting us in flowing periods and a third julep, ordered this time at his expense.

With a mighty effort Jack mastered his feelings until we were out of earshot. Then the vials of his wrath burst forth upon me. In no uncertain terms he told me just how many kinds of a fool I had been, completely exhausting his vocabulary on me and ending up by saying lamely, "And in spite of all my advice, legal and otherwise, here you allow yourself to be robbed outrageously by the biggest fake south of the Mason and Dixon line. I'm ashamed of you," he continued, with his disgust growing again. "Either you've got money to burn, or are plumb crazy. If this is a sample of you Northern lawyers' methods, I'm going to pack my grip this minute and take the next train for Boston. I could make my everlasting fortune in six months skinning you."

When he finally stopped for lack of breath, I laughed and said, "My boy, from your standpoint your energetic remarks are pertinent and probably justified, but in this particular case there is a reason which I cannot impart to you, that makes the cleaning up of this apparently small matter of the first importance to me, personally, as well as to the Lees." I was thinking of Manners and our quarrel.

The money I had used was, strictly speaking, my own, for Mr. Willard had given it to me to use without any strings attached, but I preferred to regard it as his still, and I knew that he would heartily approve of the use to which I was putting

it. I shuddered at even the thought of keeping it myself; it would be no other than blood money in my mind.

"And now, Jack," I continued, "I'm going to fix your fee in this affair myself and you are to have nothing to say about it. You have done a good job, but your compensation is not to be based upon the work you have done but upon the amounts involved and the importance of the victory in our eyes," and I counted out the other five hundred, and, rolling it up tightly, slipped it into his side pocket.

He looked at me as though he really thought I were mad, and then replied, "Well, you *are* crazy if you think for an instant that I'm going to accept *that,* for a day's work, especially when you did the most important part of it yourself. If I ever tell the Lee girls about your behavior this afternoon, and the way you have thrown their money away, they'll fire you P. D. Q. and sue you for breach of trust and misappropriation of funds to boot. Here, take this back."

"No. I'm in earnest, and I promise you that they will find no fault with my liberality. Take it, Jack, and my heartiest thanks go with it, only don't spend it all in riotous living."

"I can't make it out at all," he said, shaking his head. But my heart was beating with exultation. However slight the possibility of trouble for the Lee

girls may have been, I had beaten Manners' horse, foot and artillery, and won for Margaret. And I had got rid of the money, the very sight of which filled my soul with loathing — and I knew that Willard would never agree to receive it back.

Jack continued to shake his head, saying, "Either there's something back of this beyond my comprehension, or you've suddenly lost your mind. A cool thousand dollars for a deed that, in all probability, is absolutely unnecessary. That's my idea of tossing good money into the fire, and I bet I'll be pinched yet for receiving stolen goods, or as an accessory to embezzlement or highway robbery or something. However, since I don't see how I can very well have you thrown into jail or shut up in a lunatic asylum, here goes," and he put the roll into his pocket-book.

"Now, young man, you're my guest for the next two weeks, and if during that time you offer to pay a bill of any kind, nature or description, I'll have you taken out and shot at sunrise. I warn you fairly. You deserve to die for to-day's work, anyway."

CHAPTER XXIV

IN WHICH I LIFT MINE EYES UNTO THE HILLS

To me, a man city born and bred, whose nearest approach to real nature had hitherto been an occasional brief fishing or yachting trip, the succeeding fortnight was a revelation, and had it not been for the inward pain gnawing at my heart, would have been one of unmixed delight.

We traveled light, our paraphernalia — consisting of a small tarpaulin shelter tent, a change of clothing, bedding, guns, fishing tackle and a few provisions for emergencies — being "toted" by a mild gray mule, while we footed it.

We left the train at a small way station at the very base of the Cumberlands and climbed through forest, pass and ravine over the mountains to the Tennessee side, amid scenes of unrivaled, rugged, wild beauty and past many little settlements or solitary cabins of the primitive mountaineers. This was an old stamping-ground for Jack, and at every cabin he met with a welcome, which, had I not known in advance that he was a privileged character in this section, would have seemed to give the

lie to the writers whose novels laid so much stress on the distrust and hatred of these people for all "furriners."

Save for an occasional terrific thunder-storm, characteristic of that region and altitude, the weather was ideally clear, and I found the people so quaint and interesting, and so genuinely hospitable and friendly withal, that my heart opened to them at once. Homely, uncleanly, and illiterate they were as a class, to be sure, and yet their splendid blood, the purest in America, made itself evident in many sterling virtues, and here and there I found a maiden of wonderful beauty and sweetness, or an old philosopher, who, with the added education and polish of civilization, would have shone unexcelled in any city of the land.

If I had unconsciously anticipated any thrilling adventures I was doomed to disappointment, for our trip was wholly uneventful.

We made and parted from new friends day by day, we hunted and fished when the spirit moved, explored deep woods, their virgin splendor yet unmarred by the ax of man, or deep picturesque ravines. We lost our way — if it could be said that we had one to lose — found it again, or another even more interesting, loafed, smoked, and slept the sleep of the just from early even to sun up.

I learned to find the purest gems of thought hid-

den in the rude speech of some wayside sage, and spent many an hour acquiring wisdom at the feet of some uncouth mountaineer, whose natural intellect, scarcely scratched by the cultivating tools of education, towered far over my own.

Under the trees at noontide or the stars at night, I came at length to learn something of Mother Nature's wonderful lesson to man, and, in the solitude of the mighty mountains, to find peace.

Fate had surely sent me there for this purpose. If a man is troubled at heart or sick at soul let him flee the city and the haunts of men. For a little time indeed, his thoughts may torture him more keenly in the silence of the woods and hills or sea, than amid the excitement of his everyday life. But as surely as the sun rises and sets, Nature will speak to his soul at last.

Before the calm, majestic greatness of the out-of-doors his little spirit will gain a realization of its own insignificance, and as the readjustment comes, the grief, which before seemed to him so overwhelming, will slip from his heart like a heavy weight. The memory of it may never be effaced, but the bitter poignancy is gone forever.

So, at least, I found it.

A friend may speak words of consolation for a moment; the cheerful mountain brook is forever whispering a message of hope and encouragement.

A friend may try to ease your burden by reminding you that, heavy as it is, it might have been worse; the tempest and the hurricane beat their awe-inspiring message into your brain, "Behold in us the vials of the wrath of God. What is a grief like yours compared to that we, in a single moment, can cause to a thousand hearts?" A friend may tell you that although your sorrow is bitter, the Lord is pitying and will help you bear it; the stars and trees and rocks whisper together, "Here *is* God, commune with Him through us, and find rest for your soul."

One evening as we sat in silence on the highest point of the divide and watched the sun set in flaming glory behind the lower range to the west, this message of Nature came to me and filled my heart. It seemed as though on the instant an invisible soothing hand had passed over my fevered soul. The thought of Margaret's love changed from one of torture, to a lovely memory, a message of strength and cheer for the long years to come. I felt my spirit growing bigger, stronger.

At the end of our stay, to Jack's unbounded delight, I was cheerful, at least ten pounds heavier, hard as iron, and my summer's tan had deepened into a weather-beaten brown through which the healthy red showed warmly wherever my face was not covered by a fortnight's growth of beard.

With the keenest regret we parted from our friends, human and inanimate, and last but not least, from our faithful pack mule, and took the train for Petersburg.

As we neared civilization once more, a little of the old restiveness came upon me, and it increased markedly as we approached our destination.

My watch told me at last that we were within half an hour's ride of the city. Jack had gone into the smoker for a few puffs at the solacing weed, and I was alone with the equipment as the train sped between broad cultivated acres and pretty little villages in the windows of which evening lights were beginning to twinkle.

Suddenly the voice of the guard broke in upon my somewhat somber thoughts, calling, "Fairdale, Fairdale."

Fairdale! The name startled me inordinately. For a moment I could not account for the quick pounding of my heart. Then I remembered. Fairdale County and the little town, the nearest station to the Lee homestead! The brakes sang; the train leisurely came to a standstill. A passenger or two arose and prepared to make their departure.

Suddenly an irresistible impulse seized upon me. I must get off and look for a moment at least, upon the home of my dear one, the house where she had been born and lived all her life.

Hastily scribbling on an old envelope, a note of vague explanation for Jack, closing it with the promise to join him later in the evening, I swung off, just as the train was gathering headway again.

I had no trouble in learning the road that led to the Lee mansion, which lay a full half hour's walk from the railroad, and as the last of the twilight failed and the newborn moon appeared in the distant east, I was walking slowly, with turbulent thoughts, up the broad driveway o'ershadowed by giant sycamore trees. As I had anticipated, the splendid old Virginia house was in total darkness although in one of the many outbuildings and cottages behind it a light shone dimly. Against the blue-black sky the big mansion itself, with its massy pillars, all a ghostly white, stood out majestically.

I do not know how long I stood at the foot of the broad steps within the deep shadow of the house, dreaming.

Suddenly the perfect silence was broken by the notes from a piano played within the room to my right, whose long windows gave upon the broad veranda. My blood chilled; it was like spirit music played by a ghost of old memories, for the melody was that of Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata." I stood transfixed to the spot as though in a trance. Who but one being in all the world played that composition with just that touch?

The music died away but I stood immovable. The great door swung open and in the perfect doorway stood — Margaret!

The picture was almost the replica of the one which had greeted my sight that never-to-be forgotten moonlight night three weeks before in Newport, save that it was all dimmer, as though I now saw a vision in a dream.

What spirit message passed from my soul to hers I know not, but despite the dim light that concealed more than it revealed my rough mountain costume and bearded face, she knew me instantly, and whispered, "You — you here?" and her hands went up to her breast.

"You?" was all I could reply. She looked paler than before, but to me, infinitely more beautiful, with a perfect loveliness almost ethereal. Her countenance appeared almost as white and transparent as a spirit's in contrast to her black gown.

For a full moment we stood thus, making no move to approach each other. Then, slowly, the thought that if Margaret were here her husband must be also, burned its way into my brain. I turned uncertainly, saying in a dull voice, "I will go."

My words seemed to quicken Margaret to a realization of the present. She came immediately down the steps and as she passed me said, "No, you must not go — yet, John. Come, there is something that

you must know first — something that I must tell you." She did not ask where I had been or what brought me to her home, nor did it occur to me that such a question would have been natural, or that any explanation was necessary. With my mind in a bewildered turmoil of uncertain thoughts I followed her to a deeply shadowed arbor at one side of the spacious lawn, and there faced her, still standing, although with a listless motion of her hand she indicated a place beside her on the seat where she had sunk.

Again ensued a prolonged silence which I could not bring myself to break, and when she did begin to speak, it was in a low, monotonous voice, as though her spirit were dead, and another were mechanically telling her story.

"My little world has come to an end, I think, John," she began hesitatingly, "if the future holds anything for me it is now wholly hidden, as though behind an impenetrably dark curtain which I have not the will to try and push aside, even if I could. It seems to me as though my soul had become numb, and even my love for you —" I started, tremblingly, but she stopped my half-formed impetuous outburst by raising her hand, and continued, "— cannot now arouse it."

After another pause she continued, "The morning after you left me, I went back to Roland, pre-

pared to be and do all that I told you I had made up my mind to. His first great happiness over my seemingly voluntary return was wonderful, and yet heartbreaking to me, but soon . . .

"Perhaps a great love like his — for, oh, I know now that he did love me, as I had never realized — instead of making one blind, as is so often said, brings a clearer vision than most mortal men possess, for soon he must have seen beneath the mask which I was trying to wear so bravely, and, with first a bewilderment, and later a deep sadness that wrung my heart to its depths, he gently drew from my unwilling lips, little by little, the true reason for my return and the story of — our love."

Again I started, with a question trembling upon my lips, but she forestalled its utterance by saying: "I need not conceal from you the fact that with his first great grief upon discovering that it was not love for him which prompted my return, came a bitter anger against you, but, in time, reason re-asserted itself, his better judgment showing him that you were in no wise blameworthy, being, like himself and me, merely the victim of a bitter jest of Fate. Nor did he blame me, even for my foolish — yes, wicked — deception from which came the tragedy into which all of our lives have been plunged.

"He seemed to realize, with a more than mortal understanding, that I had already suffered punish-

ment enough in the travail of my soul which had preceded and prompted my sacrifice. He left me almost immediately, and I spent an hour alone in misery, while he fought out alone the greatest battle that a man is ever called upon to fight — the battle with Self. When he came back his mind was made up, his course of action fully determined upon and he imparted his decision to me almost with the calmness and impartiality of a judge. He would not accept my sacrifice, for he said that he could never take to himself as his wife a woman whose heart he knew belonged to another. Neither would he set me wholly free, for he told me, as though he were reading me like an open book, that I was young and my character still unmolded. I might not even yet know my real mind or be certain that my love for you was true and enduring — not a mere passing romantic passion. Then, with a pitying gentleness that cloaked an iron resolve which I knew could not be shaken, he imparted his plan for my — for our future. He was to leave me free to act in whatever way my conscience might dictate, and himself go abroad immediately. For three years he would stay away from America, nor during that time would he write to me or supply me with any money — for, of course, he knew that I was well supplied with the necessities of life — although he said that he did not intend to alter the will he had already

made in which he had left to me all that he possessed."

This time my look of growing understanding caught her glance and she answered my unspoken thought, saying, "You have guessed his purpose, which was, as he told me, in this way to furnish me with a legal cause under the laws either of Massachusetts or Virginia for divorcing him quietly and without a contest, if, at the end of that long period, I found that my heart still remained steadfastly yours.

"He promised me that during these years he would so live that if I should ever change my mind and feel that I really wanted him, he could come back to me more worthy of my love and respect than he had been before, and he said that one word from me would suffice to bring him home, but of his own volition he would not come. Destiny had decreed that each of us should bear a cross, and, whatever *we* might do, he would bear his patiently and without complaint. Yours, if you were man enough to take it up and carry it, would be to leave me as he had, refraining from any endeavor to influence me by word or action, while I underwent alone and unaided, the test which should make or break my soul and decide the future for us all. This would be my burden, and to it would be justly added the necessity of facing an inquisitive and

callous world, for he meant to leave me without any explanation, and I could scarcely hope to keep such a rare morsel as our separation from insinuating and gossiping tongues.

"As Roland unfolded his plan it seemed to me as though not he, but some deity were pronouncing an immutable decree which must be obeyed, nor could any arguments or pleas of mine shake his determination. He left me that evening, and I have come home to face my little world without explanation or complaint, if I can, and to bear my cross as he willed, until God takes it from me and shows me the true path through the shadows in which the future is now enshrouded."

She stopped, and then added slowly, and with a calmness which brought its counterpart out of the chaos that filled my soul, "And I know that you will do the same, John, sure — as I am — that our love will somehow find a way to teach us how to bear our lot unflinchingly until the clouds are lifted."

Not one word had I uttered during her recital, nor could I speak even now. Understandingly, Margaret rose, and with a stifled sob which shook her whole being, she passed by me without even a touch of the hand or a glance, and walked very slowly from the arbor and across the lawn to the darkened house.

I stood immovable until I heard the big front

door close behind her, and then turned and faced the future with a feeling as though the greatest part of myself had been suddenly taken away from me, leaving a void which nothing could ever fill.

CHAPTER XXV

IN WHICH MORE THAN TWO YEARS PASS

FORTUNATELY for mankind it has been endowed with a God-given power to endure the many ills that flesh and mind are heir to until the bodily pain or mental torture, be it ever so sharp, eventually yields to the great healer — Time. Indeed, it is more than fortunate; it is an absolutely necessary adjunct to the Creator's plan for the world that man can turn from the bitter loss of his loved ones, sure, from the experience of other men throughout all the ages, that the poignancy of his heartache will, in time, pass from him, and that he will receive the required strength and courage to enable him to return to his daily round of duties to find in them, if not the happiness he formerly knew, at least an antidote to his pain.

So it was with me. With my will made strong by the memory of Margaret's strength and purity of purpose, I returned home at once to take up my burden, and, if I could, bear it as unfalteringly as I knew she was to bear hers.

Jack Borroughs had importuned me to remain

in Petersburg and form a partnership with him, when I told him that I had ended my connection with my former employers, but, greatly as such an arrangement might have appealed to me under other circumstances, I could not then bear the thought of being constantly so near to Margaret. I felt that my will could not endure so great a test.

Firmly resolved to start in practice for myself, I hastened back to Boston immediately, nor was my decision to be altered, even though Mr. Thomas most kindly urged me to resume my former connection with his firm, adding financial inducements which, a month previous, would have sent my spirits soaring skyward. Incidentally, during our conversation in his office, whither I had gone to make a brief formal report of my mission, he told me that Mr. Willard had ascribed to me the full credit for its successful outcome as far as the return of his wife was concerned, but had added that, unhappily, they had found that the breach between them was too wide to be bridged at once. He had apparently dismissed the matter with that unsatisfactory explanation coupled with the request that the same secrecy be maintained about the whole matter as theretofore, and I could see that this marked reticence, contrasting so strongly with his former full disclosure of all the details of his marital difficulties to his counsel, had strongly aroused Mr. Thomas' curios-

ity. But if he had hoped to have some light shed on the true status of the affair and the reason for his client's sudden change of attitude by his interview with me, he was doomed to disappointment, for I felt under no obligation more than briefly to outline the manner in which I had come to know Mrs. Willard.

Mr. Thomas also handed me to read, several clippings from the news and society columns of New York and Boston papers of the week before, which commented with all manner of pertinent and impertinent conjectures upon the astonishing fact that Mrs. Roland Willard, who had been married less than a month before, had re-appeared at her own home in Fairdale without her husband, or vouchsafing any explanation for this singular fact. And, because of her complete and unaccountable silence, and the fact that no one could discover where Willard was — for he had apparently somehow succeeded in reaching Europe and joining his yacht without his identity having been disclosed — this astonishing mystery in high social circles became a seven days' wonder, and my heart bled for the girl who, alone and with no one to share her sorrow, had to endure this painful notoriety and these unpleasant insinuations. But, like all seven days' wonders, the world hastened to forget it as soon as some new sensation occurred to tickle its imagination, and it

was only referred to again at longer intervals thereafter when Willard was reported as having been seen in some out-of-the-way part of the world as a member of some daring hunting or exploring expedition. At such times the old flame was temporarily fanned into life again and the story retold with new conjectures and embellishments.

Shortly after my return I received a letter from Jack which finally closed one of the matters in which my life had been involved, for in spite of Mr. Hammond's prophecy, Manners, realizing that he was squarely beaten, made no further attempt to secure the Lee property, and my path and his have never crossed since.

The letter read,

"Dear John:

"I have a piece of news for you which has been to me as much of a riddle as your own behavior when you were here, but perhaps you may have the key and discover the answer.

"A few days after you left, I was astonished to receive a call from Mrs. Roland Willard. I had known her by reputation for some years, of course, but never met her personally, and, of course, I had read about her inexplicable separation from her husband. For a moment I did not know but that she had come to consult me about that very matter, and I had visions of being one of the central figures in a sensational divorce case. But no such luck. It seems that the old de-

Vignier ladies had told her something about what had been going on in her absence with relation to her property, and, of course, got it all hopelessly twisted up. She wanted to hear the truth and I explained the situation in detail, showing her your first letter and describing what, under your instructions, I myself had done, and what you had accomplished personally.

"During my recital Mrs. Willard acted about as strangely as you had, and I firmly believe that it was the first time she had heard of the matter. Indeed I would not have been surprised to have had her repudiate the whole transaction and demand my fee back, but instead of that she sat almost without moving until I had finished, and then amazed me by bursting into tears. When she had calmed down a little she further dumbfounded me by trying to get me to accept a still further fee in the matter, and when I refused, somewhat brusquely, I'm afraid, insisted that henceforth I regard myself as her attorney for the purpose of managing her affairs in Virginia, so I have something more to bless you for.

"But what struck me as the strangest part of the whole interview, in thinking it over later, was the fact that she did not once speak your name or either commend or condemn you for the action you had taken. The whole affair is beyond me."

There was a little more to the letter but it was immaterial, and I had my reward in knowing that Margaret knew what I had accomplished — for her.

I opened a modest office alone, and, as though the fickle Goddess of Fortune were at last trying to make

material amends for the injury she had done me, she caused my practice to prosper beyond my expectations. Not only did Thomas, Richards and Henry turn many a small matter in my direction, but in Mr. Hammond and Bert and Marion Aldrich I found splendid clients — indeed I sometimes had a feeling that they purposely "made" business for me. The latter two were married during the first winter after my visit to Newport, and I had almost sacrificed Bert's friendship by refusing, without being able to give a convincing excuse, to act as his best man at the wedding — which, of course, took place at Fairdale.

And thus the days dragged on into weeks and the weeks into months until two long years of working and waiting had passed, and a third had begun.

The passing days had left their sobering mark upon me, and my life moved on monotonously, to all outward intents and purposes as though nothing out of the ordinary had ever occurred in it. Pleading the necessity of close application to my professional work, I went rarely into society and consequently soon acquired the inevitable reputation, bestowed by the careless, self-centered world, of being a hopeless recluse and utterly lacking in interest.

During all this weary time not a single word had passed between my dear one and me. Hear of her I did at infrequent intervals, from Bert, and — more

rarely still — Marion, but whereas the former spoke of her freely, though casually, the latter's remarks were always studiedly impersonal, and I assumed, rightly, that Margaret had taken her wholly into her confidence at last and pledged her to treat the situation as we did and to think of us as mere acquaintances.

Yet their brief mentionings of Margaret and her doings, meager though they were, seemed to me at first like oases in the dreary desert of dragging days, or, as time passed and my vision of the personal Margaret changed into a dreamlike bitter-sweet memory — more like unreal mirages creating within me yearnings which they could not satisfy.

From them I learned that, like myself, she had sought solace in labor, and, because of her sympathetic understanding of the troubles of others, her helpfulness and unostentatious charities, not only in their own little village but in the neighboring city as well, had won for herself a place deep in the hearts of the suffering and needy. And so, between the lines of their spoken words, I read the story of the ever broadening and deepening of Margaret's nature, and was by it inspired to do my poor best to make my own more worthy.

In but one way did I ever offend against even the spirit of the law laid down by Roland Willard, and then it was not with any idea of influencing Mar-

garet, but rather as an offering secretly placed upon the altar of my love. On each Christmas, and Margaret's birthdays, I got Marion to procure for me a bouquet of beautiful red roses and place them with the other floral offerings made by the family, but they bore no distinguishing mark, and if she ever suspected that they were other than a gift of one of the household, I never knew it.

When the second August had come and gone, and we had entered upon the third year of the probationary period decreed by Roland Willard, my soul suddenly began to feel the stirrings of the former restlessness.

Not even by applying myself more diligently than ever to my work could I revest my spirit with the calm with which it had been clothed for so long, and each day found my agitation increasing. As the nerves of a distance runner after the weary grind has been almost completed, respond to the cry of "last lap," so my thoughts responded to the knowledge that in less than a year my dreams might have their fulfillment.

At the same time the terrible uncertainty as to what the future really held in store for me added to my mental tension. Was Margaret's heart still mine? Would she bring herself to cut for my sake the Gordian knot and free herself from the legal bond which bound her to Willard so that we might

at last be united? No matter how hard I tried to apply my mind to the solution of the legal problems which my fast growing practice presented, these two thoughts sooner or later insinuated themselves anew into my consideration, for I could never answer and so dispose of them.

Eventually my restless uncertainty became almost unbearable. I could not work properly; my rest was so broken that I became physically as well as mentally nervous; the idea that I must see Margaret and learn the truth, even if it spelt the doom of all my hopes, became an obsession. In an endeavor to fight it off and recover something of the calm strength which I had found in the Cumberland mountains two years before, I eagerly accepted from a friend the offer of his camp in the Berkshires for a fortnight, closed my office without explanation and sallied forth again into the hills in search of peace.

But this time it was not a hopeless grief which I was seeking to allay, but a perpetually upspringing hope which could not be kept down, and after the first soothing influence of the out-of-doors had passed, the solitudes of nature were worse to me than the city with its multitudinous calls and diversions.

Within the week I had returned to Boston, as though drawn back by a vague but irresistible desire to be in instant touch with the world of men, so

that if anything, whatever it might be, did happen, I would be ready to act at once. Little did I realize what Destiny had prepared for me, or with what speed the future was rolling down upon us.

As though some active will other than my own were directing my every movement, I purchased a paper the afternoon of my return, and, with barely a glance at the heavy-faced headlines on the first page, turned instinctively to the second and read, "FAMOUS SPORTSMAN RETURNS, Roland Willard back from Africa. Roland Willard, the Back Bay society leader and sportsman of international reputation, who, it will be recalled, disappeared from America more than two years ago leaving behind him his bride of a fortnight (the beautiful Margaret Lee of Virginia) under circumstances which have never been explained, has returned as unexpectedly as he went. He arrived in New York yesterday noon on the *Hesperian* and left immediately on the Richmond train, presumably en route to rejoin his wife who lives just outside of Petersburg, and whom he has not seen since their honeymoon." There was more to the article — the old story over again, together with a brief review of Willard's recent exploits in India and the jungles of Africa, but although my eyes read it again and again, my brain refused to register any impression save the one produced by the first paragraph.

"Roland Willard had returned to America. He had gone immediately to Margaret."

These thoughts hammering at my brain in time shaped another.

"Either Margaret had sent for him and it was at her desire that he had come, or he had broken his promise to her and returned on purpose to prevent the running out of the three-year period which would give her the right to divorce him." In either case the ban had been raised and I was no longer bound, even by my own conscience, to remain away from her whom I desired, or to refrain from trying to win her for my own.

As a supposedly extinct volcano sometimes bursts through the hardened crust above its long smoldering fires, so my primal nature burst through the superimposed restraint of civilization.

The first alternative I had put out of my mind at once. I would not allow myself even to consider it. But, as the thought of Willard's breach of faith, and his treachery toward us became more and more firmly fixed upon me, my nature for a little while must have reverted to the underlying primeval which is in all of us. I swore that no matter to what ends I might have to go I would keep Margaret from him, and make her my mate. Maddened and blinded with pent-up passion, anger and fear, I raved about my room like an enraged beast. At

last however, the restraining influence of the ages slowly reasserted itself. I became calmer, my thoughts more collected, although my purpose remained unaltered.

Careless — indeed wholly regardless of consequences — and with no real plan of action in mind, but only the idea of making a bitter fight for the love which was all in all to me, I took the first train for New York and the South, and late in the afternoon of the following day found myself at Fairdale, still without a course of action settled upon but just as determined as ever to face whatever situation I might find existent, and to fight for Margaret by whatever means.

She herself came to the door in answer to my persistent ringing, and at the sight of her beloved face the last slim barrier to restraint broke down and my love overwhelmed me.

"Margaret!" All the repressed love and longing of the two slow, silent years burst out in my cry.

"Margaret! He has come back to take you from me, but he shall not have you! He shall not have you, you are mine!" I repeated the phrase wildly, seizing both her hands in a viselike grasp.

Without uttering a word of greeting or surprise she looked at me, at first with her breast rising and falling rapidly, an unmistakable lovelight in her

dear eyes called into being by my impetuous, passionate outburst, but, after a moment, her countenance changed, and over it there settled a look of such unutterable sadness that I was silenced and filled with a wave of feeling in which bewilderment and shame, I knew not why, shared equally.

Still without speaking she turned, holding one of my hands as I slowly relinquished hers, and led me, as a mother might her angry, rebellious son, quietly up the broad stairway within, along the upper hall and into a darkened chamber.

Upon the snowy bed lay the figure of a man. From his pallid, bearded face two piercing eyes turned toward me with a feverish light in them. I knew, more by instinct than otherwise, that it was Roland Willard, but so sadly altered was he that had I met him elsewhere I should not have known him.

Slowly, and without the conscious will to do so, I moved toward the bed, feeling, rather than hearing, Margaret depart from the room leaving us alone together.

One of Willard's hands, in which the sinews and veins stood out piteously, moved restlessly on the counterpane. He regarded me quietly a full moment while I stood there unable either to speak or think coherently, then spoke in a low voice the one word, "John." Never before had he called me by

my given name, and yet somehow his use of it now did not strike me as strange; indeed I again experienced the feeling of sudden immaturity, and it seemed to me that the speaker was separated from me by a gulf of many years.

"I know why you have come," he said at length, speaking very slowly, and as though each word cost him an infinite amount of strength, "but it wasn't necessary, John. I have not come — home," the word was uttered with obvious effort, "to take Margaret from you. A Will other than yours or mine has decreed that she is not for me, and, even were I to live, which is not possible — and God forbid it — I know now that she could never be mine."

"Roland," came Margaret's low, piteous cry from the doorway, for, unable to tear herself away from the spot, she had remained in the hall listening mutely. Coming in, she hurried to his side, and taking his wasted hand pressed it against her cheek as she knelt by the bed. Slowly releasing it, he gently caressed her glorious hair as he continued, with the slightest suggestion of a sad smile touching his lips, "You must not blame yourself, dear one, but I realize as well as you do yourself now, that your heart is John's only — perhaps was never really mine — and even your sympathetic, sweet tenderness which has helped me bear my pain to-day with fortitude, could not deceive me."

Her slight figure was shaken by a deep, restrained sob, and, gently patting her hand, Willard went on almost as though we were not present and he was merely speaking his thoughts aloud,

"It is indeed strange and wonderful how mysteriously God works out His plans for men. Two years ago, although my heart was rebellious against itself and all the world, I tried to arrogate to myself the qualities and powers of a judge, even, indeed, something of the omnipotence of the Almighty Himself — and I attempted to decree how three lives should be lived, little thinking that what I might say or do counted not at all in His great plan for us. But now my soul has at last been taught the great lesson of life, and I am sure that, even if I had not fallen a prey to this fatal disease, which, more deadly than the wild beasts, lurks for men in the African jungles, I would have bowed to the inevitable without further protest — even happy in her happiness." He paused a moment, then added, "But this is the better way, and I am content. I have learned in solitude to conquer self and play the part of a man — as you have, John — and I am ready to go whenever my summons comes." Again he stopped, this time with the silence which comes from exhaustion, and neither Margaret nor I spoke or moved. At length Willard went on, in a voice so low that I could barely catch his words,

"Into your loving keeping, John, I entrust my — Margaret, and I pray that the years which are to come will mean for you, what I had once fondly dreamed that they might mean — for me. Now I am very weary. Please leave me for a little while."

Margaret rose from her knees beside him and turned with me toward the door as I moved away after grasping Willard's hand and murmuring some almost unformed words more pregnant with feeling than any real sentences could have been. Tears which welled into her eyes and ran unheeded down her cheeks, blinded her. "Margaret, don't go," called Willard in tones filled with pleading and pain. She turned quickly back to him, and, alone, I blindly found my way from the room, down the stairs and out into the cool evening. Instinctively my steps turned toward the arbor where, two years previous, Margaret had told me of her husband's decree.

Long wavering shadows were beginning to fill it again.

The last fading rays of daylight slowly died; darkness came on.

The stars shone out one by one, the new moon appeared, but I did not move, and scarcely thought logically. The great revelation of a love too pure and great to be long of this earth, which I had been

witnessing, had left my sensibilities powerless to respond to their ordinary functions.

An hour passed — perhaps several, I do not know. Then I saw Margaret approaching me through the night, a dim, unreal figure. When she was close enough for me to see her face, I saw that it wore a look of such etherially sweet sadness that I did not need to hear her low spoken, "It is all over, John," in order to know the truth.

Her voice broke the spell which had been laid upon my heart, and my love, a love now mixed with a great pity, welled up within me until it filled my whole being, and yet some invisible power still restrained me from taking her in my arms. I felt at that moment, as though our former love had been purged of all worldly passion in the fiery test which we had undergone, Margaret so steadfastly, I falteringly, but saved by her strength.

Quietly she took my hands as if the same thoughts were in her mind, saying, "Come."

I stepped close to her side, and, as I did so, her form seemed to relax and sink down limply, and to save her from falling I caught her close to my breast. Instantly the pent-up sobs, no longer to be denied expression, broke from her and she clung to me with her soft arms tightly encircling my neck.

"Oh, don't leave me, John! Don't ever leave me again!" she shuddered.

"No, dear heart, I shall never leave you again," I whispered, my lips seeking and meeting hers.

THE END

SMILES, A ROSE OF THE CUMBERLANDS

By Eliot Harlow Robinson

Author of "Man Proposes"

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Smiles is a girl that is sure to make friends. Her real name is Rose, but the rough folk of the Cumberlands preferred their own way of addressing her, for her smile was so bright and winning that no other name suited her so well.

Smiles was not a *native* of the Cumberlands, and her parentage is one of the interesting mysteries of the story. Young Dr. MacDonald saw more in her than the mere untamed, untaught child of the mountains and when, due to the death of her foster parents a guardian became necessary, he was selected. Smiles developed into a charming, serious-minded young woman, and the doctor's warm friend, Dr. Bently, falls in love with her.

We do not want to detract from the pleasure of reading this story by telling you how this situation was met, either by Smiles or Dr. MacDonald — but there is a surprise or two for the reader.

Press opinions on "Man Proposes":

"Readers will find not only an unusually interesting story, but one of the most complicated romances ever dreamed of. Among other things the story gives a splendid and realistic picture of high social life in Newport, where many of the incidents of the plot are staged in the major part of the book." — *The Bookman.*

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Many changes come to them while in the country, the greatest of which is Tweedie — a simple, unpretentious little body who is an optimist through and through — but does not know it. In a subtle, amusing way Tweedie makes her influence felt. At first some people would consider her a pest, but would finally agree with the Carlton family that she was "Unselfishness Incarnate." It is the type of story that will entertain and amuse both old and young.

The press has commented on Mrs. Mullins' previous books as follows:

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"A rare and gracious picture of the unfolding of life for the young girl, told with a delicate sympathy and understanding that must touch alike the hearts of young and old." — *Louisville (Ky.) Times.*

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Author of "Blue Bonnet — Debutante," etc.

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Henrietta was the victim of circumstances. It was not her fault that her father, cut off from his expected inheritance because of his marriage, was unexpectedly thrown upon his own resources, nor that he proved to be a weakling who left his wife and daughter to shift for themselves, nor that her mother took refuge in Colorado far away from their New England friends and acquaintances. Youth, however, will overcome much, and when Richard Bently appears in the mountains, life takes on a new interest for Henrietta.

When her mother dies Henrietta goes to live with Mrs. Lovell, who knew her father years ago in the little Vermont town. Mrs. Lovell determines to do what she can to secure for Henrietta the place in society and the inheritance that is rightfully hers. The means employed and the success attained — but that's the story.

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